

CHAPTER ONE

Adjusting my dark blue Marine Corps tunic, I step off the train at Tokyo station. It is dusk. It is April 8th, 1950—Buddha's birthday. I stand on the platform and, with a cocky air, set my white dress cap down over one eye and gaze about me. To me it is a beautiful sight, especially after my short sojourn at Gotemba, and the dull olive drab barracks, the purple-black cinders, the hurly-burly of Marines packing and getting ready to ship to Korea.

Here, whirling around and about me is hurry too, but of a different nature. It is an intoxicating activity and I stand with my over-stuffed suitcase in hand watching excitedly the crowds of Japanese civilians embarking and disembarking. Like corn from a hot popper they scatter in every direction, but mostly into the vast metropolis of Tokyo itself, into that fast-darkening limbo of emerald green, ancient grey buildings, and foaming cherry blossoms. I had learned earlier from one of the conductors on the train coming up that the railway system carried around 370,000 people per day and supplied at least one hundred and thirty trains with which to do the carrying. As I stand and watch these crowds I no longer doubt the conductors words, though at the time I admit I had been skeptical.

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And one wonders how so many people can fit onto so small an Island. But they do fit indeed, like ants in an ant hill.

I have a sudden impulse, like all strangers in an unknown land, to follow the crowds but where, and in what direction? I take out my billfold and look once more, and for the hundredth time, on the address at which I am to be stationed.

It reads: American Embassy—Enokizaka-Machi, Akasaka, Minatoko. Telephone—48-4121.

Good God! It might as well be somewhere in hell! Forlornly I stare into the shimmering blaze of neon lights, the somber towers rising faintly, frighteningly into the night sky, at the hurrying mass of people vanishing into the black depths, as if being swallowed up by the monster of night. For me, just twenty four, and not long from the blood-stained sands of Iwo Jima, it is fast becoming a terrifying picture.

Feigning a courage I am far from feeling, I follow the crowd. I straighten my shoulders, poise my one hundred and twenty pounds—too small for a Marine, my D.I. once told me—and walk with a briskness accompanied by a noticeable tap-tap of my booted heels, that pretense of quick sounds which automatically suggests to others that one knows where one is going. I had not the vaguest idea as to where I was going, only that I was assigned to duty as a guard at the American Embassy, but where in the hell was the American Embassy? Feeling somewhat insecure again, fatigued by the hours of travel

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on the over-crowded train; and the desire for a good meal, I wished now that I had remained with the other five Marines who were scheduled for duty at the Embassy with me. For once in my life I regretted I was a "loner" and yearned desperately for some of the fellows who had shared duties with me at Gotemba, any of them, or even one of them. I would even settle for little, shy "Dirt Dobber" from Alabama, or the Cajun Blaze from Louisiana. How assuring would be the slow slurring voice of one, the thick liquid vowels of the other. How comforting in this maze of oddly groomed flesh: their slim bodies touching yet their attitudes so aloof as to be terrifying.

I keep a sharp eye out for the other Marines as I move in this enormous, dark sea of faces, of sad eyes, of deploring eyes, and I stay alert for signs of Americans, or even American service men. I am also keenly aware of those sallow faces which glare at me occasionally and who remind me, with that gaze alone, that we, the Americans, are their conquerors, and I do not have to be told that they are profoundly unhappy about their present situation. I am their unremitting enemy and they mine, although their Emperor has surrendered and General Douglas MacArthur has been here, ruling with martial law since August of 1945. Especially among the younger men do I see this, those about my age (twenty to twenty five) for their insolence is more predominant than this frightful city which, in its tunnels of immense darkness and its cascades of

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fantastic lights seem destined to gulp me up, to ingest me in its vastness, there to torture and destroy me. I feel strangely that I am the fly, that Tokyo is the spider, and these angling treacherous streets form the web which, repellantly-but somehow still invitingly-lead me on. I pause at the corner of one street and check my bearings. My suitcase seems suddenly heavy so I put it down. An old man, who looks a hundred, or ageless, squats on the sidewalk. Before him lies a scroll of white silk on which he is painting dark, mysterious symbols. He writes, eyes me, then writes again. I have the sensation of being cheated. I feel that he already knows beforehand my fate, that he sees something about me which tells him my destiny, and he is putting it down in red paint on white silk, drawing out my pattern, tracing my route on the map of my life, weaving with scarlet and white thread the tapestry which is to become my fortune or my fate. And doom is written on his parchment-like face, in the deeply set caverns below his protruding cheekbones, in the set of his elongated teeth under tight lips, in the slit of his eyes, like a serpent's, which is perceptive enough of tragedy to coil in readiness for attack. I know, instinctively, that he is one of the many hundred fortune tellers who have invaded these maddening streets; that he, like them, sit and unravel the lives into which they have the gift to see; brushing the ink to the final happy or gory end; and that, for a few coins scattered upon the filthy sidewalk before him, he will bless or curse. He

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looks dimly at me, almost in disdain, and makes a sign. Hastily I pick up my suitcase and move on. I do not care to know my future, especially if it will be anything similar to my past. My hunger is increasingly acute now, so I decide to eat first then look for the Embassy later. Perhaps, after a good meal, a drink, and some relaxation, my faculties might return to normal and finding the Embassy would not continue to be the utterly monumental impossibility it now seemed. So, momentarily I forgot the Embassy and searched for a place to eat. I enter Eigakan-Dori, "movie house street." I recognize it instantly from a travel folder I read while on the train. It is Tokyo's Asakusa amusement quarter, one hundred and fifty yards long and open only to pedestrians. Paper flowers and brightly colored flags hang from the eaves of the many movie theaters, and multi-colored neon lights are everywhere, like a multitude of glowing, fiery jewels. I see familiar marquees as I move down the wide street, and the photographs of American movie stars warm my heart a little and take me home, momentarily. I remembered reading somewhere how dear movies were to the hearts of the Japanese, both young and old alike, and there was vivid testimony of it here. Movies from India, from Hong Kong, from Iran, New Mexico, France, Bolivia, Nigeria, not to mention Japanese and the United States. I walk slowly past lounges, bars, some with signs in English saying: Coffee, Beer, and Girls, and nast tiny Japanese-girl-operated bars offering hot

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Sake and beer.

The rich, rampant odor of cooking food, the wheaty smell of stale beer and ale, the crisp fragrance of flowers, the dry rustle of paper garlands and flags, infiltrate this gaudy street, and the people who throng this tunnel of kalaideoscopic madness are like the street itself: intoxicated on gaiety, garbed in color, reckless with an air of unreconciled insolence. But I feel better now. I have shed my cloak of cowardice for one of seeming boldness. I do not have to report for duty until the ninth, so I bide my time, window shop, marvel at the thousands of gadgets for sale, wander aimlessly, contentedly on into the broad, colussus "Ginza."

Here, ablaze with every color and hue in the universe, and with these myriad colors emblazoned in sprays of neon tubes-miles and miles of tiny glass lights-everything is for sale. This is the melting pot of the Eastern world, and no wonder. Every species of the human race is represented here. It is startling, strange, exotic to me and, though I am still young, and have traveled threefourths the way around the world, my eyes have never been so regaled, so completely awed. Its madness catches me in madness. Its color dictates to me. (Being somewhat of an artist, color has been my God.) I side-step into a tiny bar, rest my arm from my heavy suitcase, and buy a cold beer. With an air of holiday I lean on the bar near the street side corner and savor my surroundings. What cares I formerly had ceased to be, like the snow that melts

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before sunshine, and I watch the frenzy of passerbyers with an isolated enjoyment I had not known for many months. I had not realized it had been so long since I had rubbed elbows with civilians, had seen city streets and lights, girls and young men not in uniform, old people and children—even if I was seeing it all in Tokyo. It was still a city, a thriving, bustling city, overflowing with life, as modern as tomorrow, yet as ancient as the oldest scrolls of time.

Though I saw no grey temples with their red prows thrust to the dark, night sky; nor no slant eyed girls with towering wigs and elaborate kimonos I knew-through the picture folders-that, invitingly, they were here amidst this chaotic grandeur. This realization, mixed intoxicatingly with my onset of gaiety, spurred my holiday air. And I knew at this moment, dispelling the ominous aura of the old fortune teller and my feeling of displacement at the railway station earlier, that I was going to like Tokyo. The vivid color, the noise, the rampant odors, the laughter, the inimical insolence, the swell of momentary loneliness, grabbed at me, shook me violently, and stirred within me. As though in recollection, scenes of the ancient places I knew I would eventually search out in the time ahead-the old temples breaking through pines, Torii arches of scarlet, tiny wooden bridges over quiet garden streams, bright paper parasols, silks, paint, lanterns, girls, and young boys, and perhaps love, danced through my mind.

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I was still young, a combat veteran but not battle-weary, though I had lasted through four major campaigns: Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima. I was small of statue, dark of complexion, with jet black hair. Strangely, it seemed to me now akin to these wayward but shy people who, like I, had endured the devastations of war and were yet alive enough still to search for the pleasures, if not the abiding bonds, of love. Now at this moment, standing at the end of this tiny lavender bar, splendid in my tailored blues, in the very heart of the Ginza, I feel somehow baptised in the rawness of this isolation, this sadness, this snatched bit of gaiety. I am no longer a stranger. I am like them. I have no home. I have no loved ones. I have no close friends. There are no ties that bind me-with the exception of the Marine Corps-my only home and my only profession. Perhaps like them too, I consider myself, gauge my values, and regard the past as the worst that can ever happen to me. There is but one difference.

I am of the conquerors. They are the conquered people.

Above the noise now I can hear the subtle beat of bamboo sticks, the muffled throb of drums, and I strain my eyes to see what is causing the commotion, strain my ears to pick up every sound, every minute cadence of an approaching cavalcade. Heading the procession is a group of strangely-garbed men carrying lighted lanterns on long bamboo poles. Weaving in and out among them are

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younger men playing the shakuhachi, or flute, and many are playing the samisen, a guitar-shaped instrument. Very young girls in brightly colored kimonos follow, each with a huge koto, or harp, which they pluck with discordant rebellion. All these sounds are mingled, creating a monstrous crescendo, and these vibrations, in turn, are woven into the sounds of the Ginza, the cheers of the bystanders, the modern juke-boxes blasting American records, the jazzy intonations sweeping out from the bars and lounges. Next, and in a seemingly endless flood, come papier-mache figures mounted on floats, many picturing ancient warriors, demons, Gods. With these, stream hundreds of people carrying small black trays. On each of these sits a miniature Buddha, a tea pot and several china cups.

The girl tending the bar takes note of my interest, taps me on the arm, reminds me it is Buddha's birthday. I had forgotten.

I ask her about the trays.

In broken English she answers:

"Tea—pour tea over Buddha, then drink it—very ancient custom." She smiles, shows two neat dimples. "Buddha very special today—like your Jesus. Children decorate temple with many flowers—make business good today, like every year."

I smile my most captivating smile, then turn back to face the Ginza and the ceremonial parade. It is gathering something of solemnity now. Men and women in dark costumes, and of white and red, stroll past, their heads bowed sadly, their hands

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hidden in the sleeves of their robes. Children, also darkly-clad, pass in huge groups, like the Munchkins from The Wizard of Oz. Then, more grownups, cramming the wide street in a never-ending, colorful file. Some are on horse-back. And both horse and rider are elaborately adorned in gleaming armour, with scarlet and canary ribbons fluttering wildly behind, mingling with the high silken banners, the make-believe warriors perch vertically their saddles. All the gory, gaudy, beautiful costumes I have seen in books, in pamphlets, and in the movies since early childhood, seem to be passing before me, like a fantastic dream that has no beginning or no end. For a defeated people I think they have recovered dramatically. Then I see a sullen face, the glint of piercing eyes, the mask of mockery, and I return to my former opinion. They are in costume, paying homage to their God, festive only for this honored occasion, gay only on the surface, their eternal resentment well-hidden beneath garlands and silk.

Among the throng of black robes, of solemn bowed heads, I see the twirl of an enormous parasol. It is an intense orange, so bright it hurts my eyes, as if it glows from some mysterious innerlight, or, as if it has been lacquered with luminous paint which lights up in darkness. It is being carried by an old man in a black robe, robust seemingly for his years, but never-the-less old, for his head is as bald as an eagle, and a long triangle-shaped beard, as white as snow, falls sparsely from

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his chin. I had seen his type in the movies many times, but the young girl who walks beside him is unlike anyone I have seen during my lifetime. To say she is beautiful insults her as a person, for a jewel is beautiful, but it has no life. This spirited girl is brimming with life—vital, electric, spontaneous life. She is attired in a costume which I cannot name nor place in any country I recognize. That she is Japanese is unmistakable. Her dark lashes display that stamped almond slant. Her hair, like all the Japanese on this island, is as black as ink, and as straight as an American Indian's. Her stature is petite, almost doll-like.

Her flesh glows radiantly beneath the soft orange light of the whirling parasol above her. Her hair is pulled back tightly and coiled into a knot at the nape of her neck, and is crowned with a black, wide-brimmed hat much like that of the Spanish Dons. Her short coat is black also, and cut in mannish fashion. She is wearing a white, ruffled shirt, black shoe-string tie, and her tight black pants have the cut of capris. Soft, black leather boots with high-heels, rose to the calf of her legs, and from them dangle scarlet tassels.

I cannot take my eyes from her. She is directly before me now, and I get a true glimpse of her striking good looks. If there is such a thing as the eyes conveying an essential, desperate message to others, mine were certainly attempting to achieve it, for I see something here I have never seen before in a female—beauty with the exotic combination of

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the female-male image which (and I am no exception) has always held mystery for men, through all time. That she was a girl in masculine clothes intensifies this mystery, feeds the fire of the imagination, and at this point mine was caught up in an inferno—like a roaring volcano. I want her. I want her maddeningly. It is as suddenly simple as that.

That I was simply hungry for a woman was not the case. There had been women, willing women, at Gotemba. Some I had gone out with, but not physically, not sexually. A man is a man whether he loves or not. But I just had to have this strange, intoxicating girl physically and mentally. I want to own her, and as her tormenting, beautiful eyes find mine this desire within me is underscored a thousand ways in my fast-beating heart.

Brilliant eyes meets brilliant eyes. I stare her down. She takes hold of the old man's arm, in indication that she wants to pause. She pretends to observe a cascade of paper blossoms which dangle from a near-by lamp post, but her dark, liquid eyes shift to find mine, which are frozen in my head, then shift again to her decoy of interest.

Dragging my eyes away, I turn to the bar-girl.

"Who is that—the one under the umbrella?"

She gives one hasty, but disgusted look.

"That?" She points rudely. "Smart-ass from big house up on hill next to Buddha temple."

I glare at her in indignant question.

"She hypocrite-no change with Japanese times

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—no speak to American soldiers—bury heart in dead Mama-san and Papa-san killed in war—blame all American soldiers—hate! Korosu! Korosu!"

My eyebrows go up automatically at this, and I know my eyes are glittering, as they always do whenever I am faced with a challenge. This bargirl's opinion only stings my desire. What an undertaking to break through that petal-soft armour, to take the spoils!

I gulp the remains of my beer, snatch up my suitcase, and move catlike through the maze of observers who border the sidewalk six deep.

The bar-girl calls after me: "No use, Marine, she no speak, she no go with American! Get other girls! Go to Condor, just off Ginza. Plenty nice Japanese girls there." But I do not listen. Like one possessed, I am driven on, spurred by an urge within me I can neither control nor divert. I must see her, talk with her, now her—intimately. But what can I say to her? I stop abruptly. My head spins. Why—stupid me! The Embassy, of course. That is good enough excuse. I'll ask her if she knows the way to the Embassy. Thinking my task automatically made easier by my trumpéd-up excuse, I wedge my way through the crowd and out onto the Ginza.

As I near her she seems to sense my direct approach, for something within her stiffens. Her white hand on the old man's arms is rigid, and her eyes glitter like serpents.

"Lady," I manage to whisper, bowing slightly,

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and with a sweep of my white dress cap. "Could you be so kind to tell me-?"

There is a faint trace of a smile which cuts a scarlet line across her soft face, and her painted eyes, lustfully dark, twinkle gaily.

"What is it you wish?" she whispers, and the sound of her low voice is like music in my ears.

The old man turns upon her.

"Koko de Eigo o hanasite wa ikemasen." (You mustn't speak English here).

The girl withdraws. Her pleasant face instantly becomes a mask.

"The Embassy," I insist, replacing my cap at a jaunty angle. I am as cocky as most Marines, to say the least and, like they, take for granted the illusion that all women are accessible to all Marines. It is this cocksureness that does not recognize defeat. This identical conceit, though of a different essence, works on the battlefield.

And I say again: "The Embassy. Can you direct me to the American Embassy?"

The old man stops whirling his umbrella and takes a step towards me. His eyes are sad, remorseful, and they catch at mine like thorns in a lane.

"American—you waste time like today forever," he says flatly, too flatly I think. "Native Japanese girl no talk to American soldier. Ask for information at Travel Bureau. Take zei! Easy for very rich Marine!" He gives a contemptuous laugh.

The girl looks defiant, as though she has lost a contest and, at the old man's gestured command,

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takes up a new position in the parade of costumed gods and continues down the Ginza. I am not so easily discouraged. And, like many Americans, I am determined. I follow.

I watch her intently as I track her every step. She all but prances, her tiny high-heeled boots making light contact with the wet pavement. Her hips roll from side to side like a tolling bell, like Scarlet O'Hara going down Peachtree street. She keeps her shoulders arched, haughtily rigid as a queen, and there is an assurance about her carriage, an awareness of victory which makes an even match for my cockiness. I sense that she is aware that I am trailing her, and is taking silent pleasure in being trailed for, as they reach the wide and vastly high steps leading up to the temple she pauses, turns once to check to see if I am following. Our eyes meet but for an instant, brightly, but they tell me much. They beckon on to faery. She need not have worried. I would have followed her to the very gates of hell.

Half way up the steps she pauses for a second time. I halt also, putting down my suitcase as if to rest. I pay scant attention to the colorful, gay multitude that sweep up the steps past me. My sole attention is hinged on everything about her—this strikingly beautiful girl in boys clothes, this oriental Onna No Ko.

I stand in this lantern-lit darkness, hypnotized, and stare up at her, at this tiny, slant-eyed Cleopatra, this American male dream personified. I want

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her. Tonight. To hell with the Embassy.

Yet, I keep my present station and my vigil. I do not know what will take place within the sacred temple. The vast throng of hurrying people, so stooped, so immersed in ritual and religion, are creating an atmosphere of pilgrimage and unshared secrecy, and I feel loneliness again as at the railway station, out of place and time.

My only roots are my deeply-reaching desire to know this exotic native, and they are enough to hold me to this spot, to wait forever if necessary—if waiting will win her at last.

As I do my own church in Louisiana I respect hers, and do not want to intrude upon some religious ritual which seems to her so vital and important at the moment. Yet—she and the old man but stand idly on the first platform of steps, half way between me and the temple, silent, demure, aloof, as if waiting for someone. At the thought of her waiting for another, perhaps a male, a Japanese lover, my heart skips a beat, but galvanizes me like a probe in the buttocks. The exotic, the unattainable, the untouchable has always held for me great and lasting fascination. And, here was the ultimate, within my arms' reach—or a million miles distant.

I was never inclined to take what I was not rightfully, lawfully permitted to possess. I was not one who seeks pleasure with such desperation that he robs in order to achieve his end. I have never been sex mad. I have always maintained a level head in the pursuit of the opposite sex. Basically, I

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could take them or leave them alone. But not this girl; not this strange Oriental creature with the lusty, mysterious eyes which beckon to me from beneath the whirling orange lights of her servant's parasol. She looks down at me now from her dark, lofty heights, like a science fiction queen on an elevated throne, and a lump rises to my throat, and a pulse in my groin threatens to master me.

Gathering my faculties, I try to focus my intoxication, not on her, but on my new surroundings. I attempt to tell myself that it is not clearly this girl which has drawn me, but Tokyo itself—the strange, the new, the exotic, the gaudy, the insolence beneath the gaiety, the hatred beneath the show of love, the bitterness beneath the rural, pastoral beauty. These tangible things I can get over. I merely have to remove my physical being from the environment. But this girl, to prevent her from stirring the physical desires within me—how so?

At the torturing thought I turn away sharply and pretend an absorbtion in the Tokyo harbor which I can see clearly from this advantageous height. Hundreds of tiny boats line the shore, some adrift far out into the Pacific waters, and they are lit with thousands of colored lanterns. Like fire-flies over a gigantic mirror, they move as if in a dream, their reflections multiplying their number in the calm water, and Tokyo itself, strung with rows and rows of blinking lights, is to me like a string of brightly glittering beads around the neck of an African.

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Rapt. I turn back, though my common sense dictates a retreat while there is still time for my heart to make a getaway; while I am still ahead of the game emotionally and physically. Sharp reminders of the Pacific Islands while I was in combat against these very same people, come trooping back into my mind. I see the dirt, the brown uniforms half covering the brown bodies, the leering slanting eyes, the mouths full of bad teeth, the gleaming razor-sharp swords, the cleverness, the skill in trench warfare, and as I see these things in the camera of my mind I see these self-same people, the blood brethren, moving solemnly up these rainwashed stairs, going to their God ... and I see those few months which had changed them from enemies to accepted allies-all too quick in time to make us common brothers. But death is stronger than religion, and love is stronger than death. It is the danger that always drives man to the cliff's edge, and woman who pushes him into the abyss.

I look up at her in a way my mother would have called wanton, and I see her there framed against the dark lace-work of pines. But she is not alone now with her aged servant. A third person has joined the party. He is a young male, barely beyond sixteen years of age I imagine, though it is impossible for me to determine. Age on the face of a Japanese does not reveal itself as on the face of the westerner. It is impossible to determine age by wrinkles alone, or if that elder has lived a life of ease and pleasure or one of strife and sorrow, for

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joy cuts lines as deep as grief. From this point I am certain he is quite young, and extremely robust. He is wearing a white haori which is cut short, striking above his thick thighs. His black head is bare. His golden, muscular legs are naked, with the exception of black zoris, or sandals. He is a good-looking boy, Oriental only in that his eyes sit in that Asiatic slant, and the low, thick build of his body, is purely Japanese. He is holding a tray while the girl pours from the tiny tea pot three cups of hot tea. Simultaneously, they take a cup each and pour it over the miniature image of Buddha which sits on the tray then, dipping up the tea, sip it sparingly. It is a quick ritual. It is over before almost it starts.

The three begin to descend the stairs. I watch them intently, hungrily and, I must confess, desperately. The boy and girl walk side by side, the old man with the orange parasol a little to their rear. As they come nearer, and as the light from the parasol illuminates their faces, I see that the boy is the youngest. Brother and sister, or cousins. I am relieved.

They are opposite me now, so close I can reach out and touch her hand. Her compelling perfume, as thick as the night, lay hold of me, and as strongly as my desires must have laid hold of her. Something electric flashes between us. Something vital. I can feel her tremble—or is it my own trembling I feel? But what matter? Cupid has strung his bow, and I pray that his aim is good. I pray, too, that her silence is a prayer.

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"Madam," I whisper imploringly, again taking off my cap in another graceful sweep. I had heard that the Japanese, those of the olden cults, appreciated these mannerly gestures. "I am a stranger here—and since you have been so kind, perhaps—"

"Perhaps what—dirty American soldier?" the young boy snaps, taking a quick step in my direction. "A date with my sister (I am indeed relieved)? She no cheap nezi girl, she flower dancer at the Kabukiza. You no can see. Hanna hate all Americans!"

I am bolder than I think.

"You my lad, do not represent the Japanese race any more than I represent the American, so cool it. I address your sister."

I turn my attention from him immediately to her, ignoring his remark completely, and I see a trace or hint of a smile break her mask.

"Don't you no call me 'lad'!" the young kid cries, belligerent as a cat dowsed with hot water. "Me Tara Rasha, karate expert—toss you in Tokyo harbor!"

"Also dancer at Kabukiza," the girl adds, somewhat cynically. I detect a note of sarcasm in her voice. I read her clearly. Male performers at the Kabukiza theater are female impersonators.

The boy flares at his sister in a small fury.

"Tosiyori! Tosiyori! No tell dirty soldier! Him stupid! He no understand!" He points in my direction.

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I play my triumph card.

"I understand, Tara Rasha (the last name comes first). I understand completely." I allow my voice to gather intensity. "It is an honor to become acquainted with one so brave and talented. It is rare indeed, I would think, for one associated with the brutal Karate to also be able to transmit the role of Okuni, a female dancer. This should reach the ultimate in both professions."

I stopped him there, but only momentarily. It takes but a minute for him to think over the situation.

"You no silk talk me, dirty soldier," he comes on readily, his arms folded akimbo, his sturdy, hardmuscled legs spread far apart. "You think me henna cause I play Kabuki? You full of stuffed turkey."

I consider his declaration, trying to gauge his Japanese terms.

"You're no more a HENNA than I am a soldier," I say whimsically. "I'm a Marine, not a soldier. You're no Onna No Ko. You're a Karate warrior."

"Same stinky difference," he spits, and gives me a cocky eye. "Soldier, Marine, Sailor—all dirty fighter. Kill family. Destroy Tokyo. Now come try take sister."

He sure knows how to cut to the quick. I remain silent for a tense moment, disturbed by what he has said. To a degree he was right. The Americans had done all these things, and much more, especial-

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ly through Japanese eyes; the eyes of people like those three who stood before me, their old way of life fled, never to reappear. That is tragedy within itself. And he was right about me too. I was here to take his sister.

I summon all my persuasiveness.

"Not to take your sister, Rasha, but to know her, to learn your ways and, in time, teach you mine."

He laughs.

"Big deal!"

I shudder. What an unmerciful kid!

"No offense to you personally," the girl speaks then, moving a step nearer, her soft voice thrilling in its sing song rhythm, "but we Japanese have seen enough of the ways of the Americans. We wish to be left alone in peace—with what peace you have left." Her eyes dim, become unbearably sad.

"I am sorry," I apologize, as if an apology can rub salve on the wounds of a broken, defeated nation.

"We do not need your sympathy," she continues in a quiet, melodious voice. "And we do not need your friendship and your truckloads of gold to come and try and buy us back."

But I am not trying to buy you," I interrupt, my hands spread wide.

She motions for me to be quiet and she goes on.

"Hear me now, American Marine, before the altar of my God, so that whatever fate befalls you in the future you cannot say that you have not

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been warned. My brother, Rasha, was but ten when the bombs came and took our Papa-san and our Mama-san. With them they took aunts and uncles and cousins, our playmates and our loves. We are left with no-one, except Ti-Si here, our faithful servant. We have tried to rebuild from the wreckage of our home which, mercifully, Buddha has spared. We have tried to go on, keeping the faith and rituals of our ancestors. We need no assistance from a man who holds out gold in one hand and feels for our bodies with the other. We are not for sale. You cannot restore your lost dignity by destroying ours. You cannot purify your conscience by taking away our Gods. You can take away our temples and our homes and our loved ones, which you have already done, but you can never take away our God nor our dignity. Go home, American, and leave us in peace."

She is near tears now and the sight of those eyes, gleaming with drops of crystal, stings me to do something for her, anything to restore her world, her loved ones; her sad face sparking within me ambitions I hadn't felt until she spoke.

A hush falls upon us which is underlaid with the wild sounds of gaiety, the mixture of American jazz and Japanese samisens on the streets far below us. I pick up my suitcase, momentarily defeated, and bow in her direction. She has told me off with a tongue of silk, and has broken it off with such finality there is no thread left for me to go on. There seems nothing left to do but turn around and

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leave, to take myself far from their dark piercing eyes, embittered with such acute hatred that their souls will forever remain in uniformed rebellion. If only there was a way that I could tell them that other nations, that other peoples had been conquered, destroyed and, from wreckage and desolation had risen to build again. But their hostile eyes stabbing at mine in the semi-darkness still whatever words I might conjure up so I turn to go. But as I turn I catch something in her eyes, something in the arch of her darkly winged brows, something sadly fleeting, something regrettable, as if she hates to see me go, and the gesture gives me a new strength of courage. Man is physically strong but emotionally weak, and I probe for words.

"Would it be permissible for me to visit your Kabukiza theater and catch one of your performances?" I ask pleasantly, quietly, summoning the total of what charm I had and hoping for the best.

The smart kid supplies me with a ready answer.

"If business is bad, dirty Marine, maybe you come sometimes. You may sit with the zyotyoos."

"You may hold your tongue, my brother," the girl intervenes, laying an insistent hand on his naked forearm. Her eyes on him are hard, scornful. "It is I who am head of the house, not you, and it is I who makes decisions." She turns to me. "The Kabukiza theater is not our property. Go if you wish, but leave us alone."

I bow to that. At least I have my foot in the

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"We go now," she whispers motioning for the other two to follow. They pick up the cue, each giving me a quick, side-long glance.

I bend slightly and kiss her hand, and in that age old gesture of appeal. "Sayonara," I mutter emotionally. "Till we meet again."

The kid makes a sound of disapproval.

"You think you kirei na Marine eh? Pretty American—with that fancy uniform. You think you hot stuff! You think you kiss hand soften heart? Sometime me catch you off guard. Me take off pants, me see if you otoko or onna!"

I look at him, cold-eyed.

"I'm male," I answer hotly, surprising him that I had understood his terms. He gives me a docile fleeting glance like a small boy caught in a display of mischief.

Desperately my eyes seek hers. I spell out my loneliness with a look. She answers. I read a thousand promises in that answer.

"Sayonara," she whispers.

"The Embassy," I cry, taking out my billfold and showing her the address. "Would you please?" Anything to delay her. Anything to hold her eyes on mine for one more second. Anything to exist within that veil of thick perfume a moment more.

"No tell him Embassy," the boy shouts, catching hold of her hand and pulling her along. "Let him search in dark. Let him crawl on hands and knees. Let him crack his skull against stone wall. Let him cut his face, his hands. Let him bleed like man in

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up, hold my throbbing head. I think on that cry, those words. Twice tonight I have heard those same words and, though I had picked up a number of expressions from two Japanese interpreters on Guam who had been attached to the R-2 section, twenty first marines, I had no idea what this word meant.

Dizzily I regain my feet. Numbly too, for my head and neck throb like bongo drums, I search for my billfold. It is still inside my pocket. I retrieve my suitcase and my barracks cap which has rolled and tipped into a mud-hole. My uniform is ruined. Sadly disheveled, I realize I am in no condition to report to the American Embassy tonight. I have to locate a cheap hotel and change uniforms before making an appearance.

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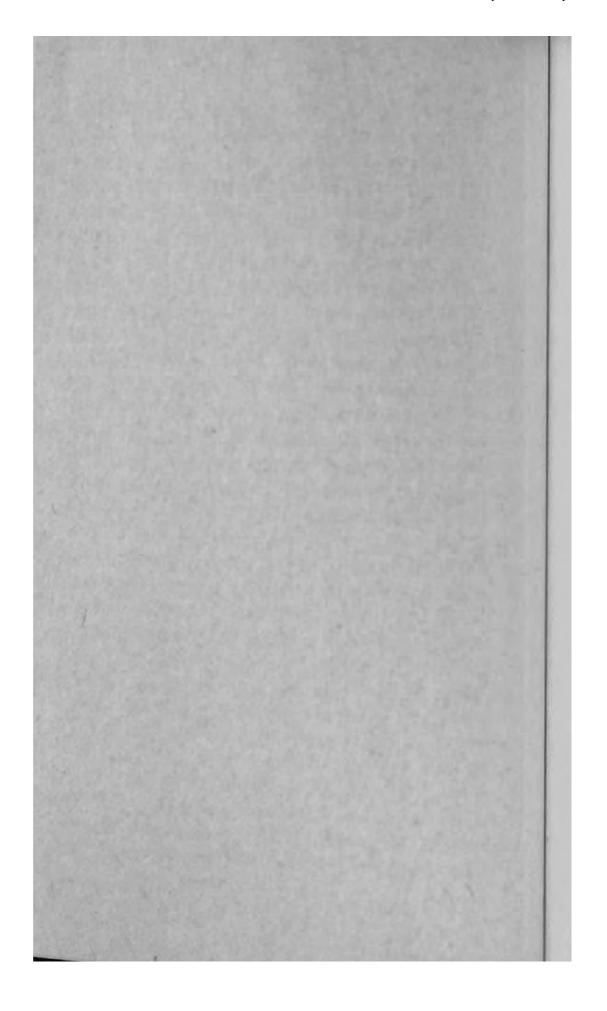
fox-hole. Let robbers twist off head, hang on bamboo pole like warriors of Fukushima."

"On Eight Street," the girl informs me, ignoring her shrieking brother completely. "Opposite Okura Museum of Antiques."

I thank her and turn to make my way in the direction she has indicated with an outstretched hand. The boy gives me the finger then, folding her arm in his, escorts her down the dark steps to the streets below, the old man and the orange parasol bobbling after them. I watch until they have disappeared amidst the throng of people, then start toward my scheduled destination.

No sooner have I turned off the Ginza and into a side street, a tunnel more than a street engulfed in betraying darkness than I hear the sounds of shuffling feet behind me. I quicken my pace, look back frequently, catch a glimpse of a silhouette moving menacingly in on me, groping in and out of gaudily colored streamers flaring wildly from street lamp and eave. I began to run. My suitcase impedes my flight, and there is a hot breath upon my neck. Hands of steel lock around my neck. I gasp, out of breath. My suitcase is torn from my grip. I hear it hit a wall on the opposite side of the narrow street. The hands unlock, but only long enough for two feet to strike, mid-air, into the side of my neck. I go down in a pit of blackness. The back of my head hits the sidewalk. Momentarily I lie still. The thud, thud of retreating steps recede into the distance. A faint voice cries: "Korosu! Korosu!" I sit

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CHAPTER TWO

It has been almost a month now since I arrived in Tokyo, and sentry watch at the Embassy is dream duty. Four hours on and sixteen hours off, regularly, with no change of schedule. My only strict obligation to duty so far is maintaining my two tailor made dress uniforms-if this can be termed an obligation—that and the rigid military ceremony of the Guard Mount. For this you have to be on your toes, but it has come easily to me, since I have always tried to be fastidious in my appearance. The laundry service in Toyko is cheap and excellent, and the shining of brass buckles and emblems requires but an hour of time each day, which I love. There are less than twenty men scheduled for duty at the Embassy and, veterans of overseas fighting, they, like me, fit into any environment and we are one big happy family. Sometimes we stand guard for one another, giving one a chance for thirty-two hours of liberty instead of the regular sixteen. It's especially handy when one of us decides to take a trip to Kyoto, or Hiroshima, or further north to Nikko or even to Mt. Fuji. So far I have remained in Tokyo. I have a boon I hope to claim from fate. My path for the future is already marked. I have only to follow it.

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I have not seen the exotic Tara Hanna nor her rebellious kid brother, Tara Rasha, since that first wayward, unsuccessful night of my stay in Tokyo, but I have searched many times. In fact, endlessly. That I should remain so persistent in seeking her out is a reaction on my part I have not had before. There are many girls in Tokyo, available, attractive girls—girls even more beautiful than Hanna. But there is no substitute for what you want . . . and I want Hanna.

That she should have simply vanished that first night baffles me incessantly. She was there, and then she wasn't; so much like a dream I dreamed. Yet I have not given up my search. I realize it is difficult, sometimes utterly impossible, to find someone in Tokyo for, to a westerner, most of the oriental faces seem all too similar. Too, forms of make-up are exasperating. The chalk whiteness, the lip and eye lines create a mask, behind which almost any face could hide, or vanish in blank anonymity.

Today is the fifth of May and, for some reason, I feel especially festive. I have had a Japanese tailor make me a dark blue cape, lined with white silk, to go with my uniform, and this morning a little past nine, I stand in the middle of the Ginza with it proudly draped over one arm. My white cap cover and white dress gloves gleam in the fresh morning light, in contrast to the dark brilliance of my cordovan boots. I feel resplendent. I glow with a tingling sensation from within, and I have that nervous,

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excited tension which goes hand in hand with the anticipation of something pleasurable, or expecting someone with whom you are in love. The tingling goes to my toes, and skips up to my scalp, and my eyes have that unmistakable sparkle which is keyed to the high pitch of fever, of conquest, of carnal pursuit. I want sex. I am hungry for the warm glow of naked, eager flesh against mine, of lips against my lips, of thighs against my thighs. I want the smell of woman to invade my nostrils, to arouse in me what no other thing is capable of arousing.

The Ginza is decorated for what I know not. Huge fish kites, pulling on their cords, float aimlessly above the street, hang limply from store fronts, and are crushed in the merciless hands of little children. These kites, though created with every flaming color human hands can paint, as gay as silk banners, as flippant as white sails on brisk wayward waters, they bring to mind a shocking picture from the past. It was during my time in the Pacific and I was on the Island of Guam. There was a high, flat plateau on the outskirts of the village of Agana. This high place formed a playground for little children. On one sunny day while they were on the plateau, playing with their kites, Japanese bombers flew over. A number of bombs hit the area. When the smoke and debris were cleared several marines and I ran to the plateau. All the children were dead, their tiny doll-like bodies flung in disarray, but their little hands still clung to the strings, and the kites were still afloat, tossing peacefully on

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the Pacific breeze.

The sight of these gaudy kites invading the Ginza now, bring the war back to me. Thinking of those tragic children, I take one of the kites down from a store front, pay for it self consciously, and bending down, give it to one of the plump little boys who has no kite of his own.

"You cannot buy back your conscience," comes a soft voice from above and, glancing up quickly, I see Tara Hanna standing before me.

A lump larger than the blarney stone blocks my throat. Thank God she is alone!

"I am surprised that you will speak," I say, heatedly, and there is a tinge of bitterness in my trembling voice.

She flinches as though I have struck her, and she lowers the soft eyes behind dusky lashes. Already emotions are being born within us both, and these same emotions are being critically wounded.

To mend this I say more restrainedly. "But I am glad you spoke." I look for a smile. There is none. But her eyes smile sadly and that is enough. The emotional gap between us is closing.

We stand for a tense moment, embarrassed, while the small children pass in a flood between us. Tangled strings and broken kites follow them in a brisk after-glow. Her eyes come to rest on them and, through want of other discourse, I tell her about the children on Guam. It pricks her heart.

"Is that why you bought the kite?" she asks, and I nod my head. Now she smiles. I have made a

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few points.

"I suppose so," I say, taking full advantage of it, cur that I am. "At least these are alive to enjoy them."

She looks at me for a long tense moment, and we two are suddenly alone in the world, just we two in this bright, colorful spring morning.

"I am glad the war is over," she whispers, so low I barely hear her, the tones broken by the turning of her head. She looks away sadly, silently, fighting back tears, her glittering eyes picking out the dark ships in the harbor. "Are you glad it is over?" she asks.

"Yes, Hanna," I answer soberly. "I am glad it is over, glad for your country as well as for mine. The United States lost many souls and much treasure—but our cities are whole. Japan has suffered loss of lives and treasure—as well as the destruction of its cities."

I expected her to fling back her head in mock surprise at what I had said, to parry with her sharp sword of words, but she kept her silence. She is annoyed by something, and that same something is mellowing her will to rebuttal. I flatter myself that she has had a change of heart since last we met.

"How does one feel this way—one who is a conqueror?" she asks finally, tilting her shining head so that her eyes meet mine squarely. There is no rebellion in her words, no menace. She is merely asking a question in a search for the absolute truth. So I answer with as much sincerity as I possessed.

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"Hanna, the individual is never the conqueror—only the mass. My country is not a nation dedicated to conquest. It never has been. It never will be. At the bombing of Pearl Harbor (I hesitate) at the burning of Pearl Harbor, the sinking of ships, the taking of hundreds of prisoners my country saw a wrong—a terrible wrong that must be righted. So—we righted it."

She lets out a tortured sigh, her shoulders droop as though that wrong lay heavily on her slight shoulders alone—shoulders not strong enough to bear it.

"I am sorry!" she cries hoarsely, dragging out the words.

"You never wanted war—any more than I wanted it, now did you?"

She shakes her head. Her eyes are melting with tears.

"Don't cry, Hanna," I whisper, my throat parched from words too tensely spoken, from emotions too deeply stirred. "You've suffered enough. And I'm going to see to it that you never suffer again." I glance at the sky, at the bright glare, at the dizzy kites gone berserk in the Pacific wind. "Come—let's find a place somewhere in the shade, somewhere where we can get something to eat, to drink. Why should we stand here in the middle of the street talking of something that is dead and gone."

"Japan come back—the old Japan!" she cries

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with a frail triumph, and there is a desperation on her upturned face.

I grab her by the arm and pull her onto the sidewalk and out of the glare of the blazing sun. She comes obediently, but not gladly, but I was determined to change all that for her. And what a pleasure that would be for me. We find a restaurant on the Ginza, two blocks from Tokyo station called the Hige No Tempei. The front was glass so that we could look out on the hundreds of children with their kites, and the low tables were of huge crosscut bamboo. We found a vacant one along the glass-rounded bay window overlooking the Ginza and, once seated on the scarlet cushions, or tokutooseki, she relaxes, the anxiety, the uncertainty disappearing from her face. I watch her as she studies the menu, notice how the canary yellow of her modern kimono reflects the bright color onto her luminous skin, how her black hair (combed so tightly over her head it looks painted) and her heavy lashed eyes, lowered demurely, display a hint of lavender reflection—lavender which seems to dominate this street and this restaurant where huge urns, randomly placed, overflow with purple iris blooms. I ask her the reason.

"It's boys' festival day," she answers readily, glancing through the glass panelling at a group of small boys tusseling over the possession of a huge red kite. "Girls will give them Tango No Sekko lolls, dolls made like feudal lords with armour and relmets and swords. Today boys of sixteen will

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become men. They will bathe in iris petals, the shobu-yu, to assure them of good health. Even our sake is steeped in iris."

I glance down at the tiny bottles, the widemouthed goblets and the small chips of lavender floating on top. I smile up at her.

"I made you a Tango No Sekko doll," she says, blushing shyly.

"Do you think I am old enough to receive it-to become a man?"

She laughs, and for the first time I get a look at her even, white teeth, made whiter still by her framing lips of glistening orange.

"Perhaps," she coos, her old bitterness gone, her ancient aloofness fled. In the clean morning light streaming through the glass she is like a radiant child-a doll child wreathed in the innocence of a woods nymph who knows no sorrow, no pain, and no death. One would think she could live forever, unmoved, unbroken, untarnished by the cruel onslaught of life, an image eternal to captivate the hearts of men. As she laughed her head tilted from side to side, making her earrings and the tiny gilded ornaments in her hair dance. Their shimmer caught the sprays of morning light and threw little reflected prisms along her face and neck.

"When can I see this Tango No Sekko doll?" I ask, using this gift as a ruse to be with her alone, or as a key to her home.

"Today maybe," she answers, though she does not look at me, rather through the window where

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the group of little boys, more like puppets I think than boys, tumble over one another in pursuit of the grounded kite. "Must be careful," she sighs. "Rasha no like me seeing you."

I frown. The memory of that kid makes my flesh crawl.

"I think your brother is—how must I say it?—dirty mean."

"Rasha not mean," she murmurs, her eyes sad again. "Only keep old traditions, like Mama-San and Papa-San wish. It is not easy to forget the war —not for Rasha—him so young."

"I suppose not," I am forced to agree for her sake. "But why does he hate Americans so much—me in particular?"

She starts to answer but keeps her silence as a waiter comes to take our order. He is wearing a white jacket so freshly pressed it seems I can actually smell the heat from the iron, and with an equally fresh napkin folded neatly over one arm. He takes our order and then she looks at me.

"You must understand er-Mr.-."

"Sergeant Erik Shannon."

"You must understand, Erik, American Marine and Sailor and Soldier take advantage of Japanese girl. Rasha know this. He see what American Soldiers do with girls on the Ginza, in teahouses, and —and bordellos (she bows her head). It no good. Soldier come but for short time, have very much money, buy Japanese girl. Most Japanese girls on starvation. They take money for food. Japanese

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boy lose face with Japanese girl, no have much money for good times, not like American soldier. Rasha very bitter. American sailor take his girl, Josei Kan, to California. Very bitter about war, about Mama-San and Papa-San, very bitter, like me-very bitter." She drags out this last.

Taken aback I cry: "He hates me then?"

"Rasha no hate you, Erik. He hate all Americans. He hate what you do to him, what you do to Japan. He try hard to compromise, but no can do. Past too strong. Rasha afraid me take up with soldier who may want me sail to America with him, then he lose me too, like he lose Mama-San and Papa-San. Rasha want me to marry fine Japanese boy of old noble family, keep tradition."

"And you intend to do this?" I ask almost frantically.

"I do not know, Erik. I know what I should do, but now-don't know. Sometime heart more important than tradition."

Her liquid eyes find mine, and she looks at me longingly, looks for a long time. My hopes soar.

Our spell is broken by the presence of the waiter who lays out our food. Sukiyaki for me, beef and vegetables, and tempura for her, fish with batter coating. We both have rice cakes wrapped in seaweed which looks like black fish skin, and is sprinkled with pink and green crystals.

"Hanna," I say, as I sample the delicious food, "I want you to listen to me for a moment. What I am going to say comes from the heart. I am not

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looking for cheap fun. There are many girls here, and I could have most of them, but I want you. From the moment I first saw you, I knew. I knew there could never be anyone else for me but you."

She lifts her head from her food quickly and her eyes are pools of mystery. She lays a dimpled hand over her breast.

"You must not say such things, Erik. Impossible! Rasha kill me. Rasha kill you—kill us both, then maybe kill self—no good!"

"Hanna," I persist, stretching my hand across the table to touch hers. She withdraws her hand. "Nothing is impossible. I want you more than I have ever wanted any woman in my life. And I want to be good to you—to you and Rasha, honest, I mean this. I want you and Rasha to like me, to love me, as I shall love you in return. I have no home either, no mother and father."

"Oh! Sorry—sorry!"

Her soft eyes burn with pain.

"No one knows more than I what a hard time you have had, you both have had, and I want you to stop having a hard time and let me help you—let me be good to you, Hanna—please!"

She stares absently through the glass panelling which now has become a bright shield of light. She blinks back tears.

"I don't know—I don't know," she laments. It is as though she is speaking to me from some place far off and I can hardly hear her. "Rasha not want that—never!"

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"I'm not asking you what Rasha wants. What do you want? It's what you want that's important."

She keeps staring through the glass, as if absorbed in a huge circular arrangement of flowers wrapped in cellophane, their colors so gaudy, so loud you would think they had the power to shatter

a prism.

"I've thought about it," she answers finally, after my eternity of tense waiting. "After—after that night—I thought what it would be to love an American—to be loved by an American—what it would be like to have his strong arms about me—his lips on mine—lips and arms not like lips and arms of Japanese man. After I saw you, Erik, your pretty uniform, your fine, good looking American face, I wonder. I wonder if love is in your heart, if you different from dirty soldiers who bombed Tokyo. I hoped—I hoped you were different."

"Hanna, look at me." She slowly turns her head and our eyes merge, hold like magnets. "I am different. There is love in my heart, and it's for you—only you, Hanna. I want your heart more than I want your body—I want both."

She sighs heavily. I lay my hand over hers. Hers remains, but it is cold, beaded with moisture.

"I'm frightened, Erik!" she cries, and though it is but a whispering cry it announces to me the uncertainty of her decision, the mistrust she feels momentarily for her own heart, which could be tray her. "I must not hurt Rasha. Don't let me hurt Rasha, please, Erik—please!"

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I pat her hand soothingly. Her individual magnetism shakes me to the deepest recesses of my heart and, though I have seen this girl but twice, I feel strongly now that I have known her for a long time, have loved her, that our lives have intermingled so profoundly that there is no way now to unravel them and return to separate beings.

"We're not going to hurt Rasha," I assured her, and I wished she loved me only half as much as she loved him. "We're going to be one little family (she attempts a smile). We're going to forget there ever was a war, and it's just going to be you and Rasha and me against the whole world from now on. There isn't going to be a Japan nor a United States. There is just going to be a little piece of land big enough for you and Rasha and me—our own private little paradise."

"If only that could be true, Erik," she whispers, sighing again. "But Rasha never consent. Maybe even if we try to love you, Rasha and me, maybe we fail you, Erik. Maybe war and death scar our hearts, make us not capable of love—maybe we hurt you, Erik."

"I'll take my chances," I say triumphantly, and chuck her under the chin, tilting her face up to mine. We finish our meal in silence then invade the Ginza. We walk hand in hand from shop to shop, talking spasmodically on trivial subjects, laugh frequently, too frequently, she relates her history, me telling her mine. We pause at shops stuffed and overflowing with wares displayed with such ornate

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artistry that artists like Braque or Picasso would have a field day. Even Dali would find inspiration in these abstract versions of color-maize, cinnamon, saffron, cedar, mahogany, black and white, not to mention green, scarlet, peppermint pink, virulent cerise, orange, yellow and Borgia emerald -what showy glimpses! Dolls, woodblocks, china, silk and lacquer, window displays of cultured pearls, authenticated by oyster tanks in full view. Emporiums of furs, of wax mannequins with pale blue eyes and flaxen hair, and tiny shops littered with millions of articles made of celluloid, plastic or nylon. In front of a record shop we buy bars of yokan made from agar-agar and sugar; and soggy, unbaked rice cakes, nibbling on them sparingly as we thumb through records, mostly American titles and American musicians.

"Rasha love rock and roll," she says, laughing, as she moons over a brightly splashed album of Dion.

"Does he have a record player?"

"He save now to buy one. Record player in Tokyo very high, cost one thousand yen—take long time. Rasha not make much at Kabuki."

I take her by the hand and lead her into the store. I select a record player which I think he would like and pay the shop clerk, who giggles like a school girl.

Hanna glares at me in dismay, her small mouth a round O.

"Rasha no accept! Too proud."

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"I'll make the gesture just the same," I say, feeling sportive.

"You waste money—he no accept."

I smile, then I come to the crucial question, the moment for which I have led up to and have nursed all along.

"Hanna, when can I come and get my Tango No Sekko doll?"

She pauses, counts on her fingers, which amuses me. I'm in like Flynn. I feel that if I can only get into her home where we can be completely alone then I can make headway with her.

"Let's see," she cries, and with an honesty bordering on innocence. "This morning I have fitting for dancing costume. Rasha in Kyoto, take karate lesson for tournament in May, be gone three days. Can you come this afternoon?"

Can I come this afternoon! Someone upstairs likes me!

"Maybe I can find the time," I say laughingly, and she laughs too. She gives me her address, I have the record player delivered, and we go outside and I hail her a taxi. At the door she pauses before entering and her dark eyes are sad again.

"Erik, tell me truthfully," she cries, her voice taking on a deep huskiness unusual with her." Are you doing this, being kind I mean, just to show Rasha and me that you no dirty American soldier?"

"I'm doing it because I love you," I answer tartly.

She smiles.

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"See you at two o'clock!" The taxi drives off, turning west and upgrade toward the temple. I stand and watch it until it disappears. Yes, I'll certainly see you at two, I muse to myself. And Rasha will be gone for three days! 48

CHAPTER THREE

I bide my time along the Ginza, window shopping and, just before two, stop by the lavender bar for a beer. The bar-girl remembers me and smiles a mocking smile.

"See you make out with that stuck up girl on hill," she says, with bitter ridicule, as she sets a drink before me.

"Not quite," I answer, "but I'm working on it."
Actually, I was doing more than that. I was throwing my every emotion, my every ounce of energy into the task.

"You play with fire," the bar-girl adds, as she settles down on a stool behind the bar and busies herself filing her fingernails. "That kid brother of hers part your hair with samurai sword."

"I bet you a beer he doesn't," I remark, sure of myself. "He'll be eating out of my hand in no time."

"Ha—that's a bet. Rasha no eat out of nobody's hand. Rasha too proud—too set on old ways, old tradition. Rasha not like other Japanese boys who do anything for American yen. Rasha hate all soldiers—he hate you too."

I shake my head pleasantly, swallow my beer and hail a taxi. When you take a taxi in Tokyo you

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take your life in your hands, and the trip to Hanna's place was a real kamikazi thrill. He lets me of before a low stone wall with a gate of heavy wrought iron, with a reckless squeak of brakes, then, running around to my side, bows and scrapes until I get out my wallet and pay him. Then he bows and scrapes some more before he drives off in a whirlwind of speed.

Like the bar-girl had said, Hanna's house set on a hill and is bordered by this low stone wall, sculptored to resemble logs. Beyond I can see the temple with the ship's eaves brilliant above the dark green pines and mist of pink and white cherry blossoms, and beside that Tokyo cemetery, with its somber tombs marked off symmetrically with sidewalks and miniature lanes.

I open the heavy gate somewhat reluctantly, now that my time is drawing near, and I tremble oddly, picturing already in my mind the hours ahead which my plotting has brought to time.

The house itself (or uti) set solemnly on the rise with curling eaves very much like those of the Buddhist temple, its long galleries taking in the full length of its gigantic proportions and broken here and there with lacquered screens and sliding doors. It centers the four stone walls and is surrounded by a quiet garden which, I think as I stand for a tense moment and survey it, defies time. Nothing, I imagine, can shake it from its grandeur, its utter lyrical minuteness, its formality of flowers and shrubs, its reign of solitude, not even war nor death. There is a

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lake directly in front of the house, mirror clear, bordered by stones carpeted with gray moss, and with an island connected to the main garden by a scarlet, arched bridge. On this tiny island stands a huge iron lantern, very much like those enormous lanterns flanking the steps and arcades of the temple, and it is aflame from within, glowing with red hot embers. And there my eyes come to rest on Hanna. She has not seen me, so I stand in the shadows of a cherry tree which half-conceals me in cascades of pink confetti, and watch her anxiously—and with a hungry longing in my heart.

She has abandoned her moden canary yellow street dress in exchange for a kimono of ancient tradition, and her hair is now dressed in the style of the Geisha. Her kimono is snow white, toned with black checks, and the only color about her person is a scarlet fan which she waves languidly as she busies herself with the rows of azaleas which form two fiery rows on each side of the flagstone path from the house to the pool. She is reflected in the quiet water, so I have a double image of her; one engulfed in emerald grass, in stalks of bamboo and cane, the other framed majestically against a blue sky. At this moment I love her. It is as simple as that.

She still has not seen me, so I tip-toe up the flagstone path and to where she stands but a foot away, her back turned to me, the radiance of her after toilet perfume already invading my senses, attacking my mind.

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"Madame—could you tell me if a pretty young girl in a yellow silk kimono lives here?" I whisper close to her ear. She turns quickly, completely startled, and I think I hear the beating of her heart.

"You take my breath!" she cried, her red fan fluttering like the wings of a startled bird. "No see you come in, Erik. My, but you punctual."

"I couldn't wait," I reply and my anxiety is

betrayed by the rasping sound in my voice.

"You too impatient, Erik," she reprimands, tapping me on the chest with the tip of her fan. "Never delight in something of which you are not capable."

I grin.

"I'm-very capable."

Her eyes look seriously on mine.

"You capable for flesh, Erik. What about soulheart?"

I nod my head. I take her hand and lay it over my heart, listen with her. "Don't you hear its pounding, Hanna? It beats for you."

"You big tease, Erik," she coos, then her face becomes grave. "I don't want to be teased—not by foreigner." She turns and gazes, as with doom, on the iron lantern sending out its warmth.

I have gotten nowhere with her. "I thought we had settled that."

"Oh, Erik, don't torment me so," she sighs, laying a trembling hand over her own heart. "After I left you, come back here, see house and cemetery

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where Mama-San and Papa-San lie sleeping, see hole in ground where bomb hit that kill Mama-San and Papa-San, see the flowers Rasha plant to cover up scar in ground, see ancestral lantern, I not know—afraid to take chance—go against Mama-San and Papa-San, go against Rasha. They sit up in grave and boo-hoo if they know Hanna take up with American soldier."

"Am I so terrible?" I demand, my carnal desires suddenly vanquished, and I feel utterly defeated, feel as if I am standing in a cold and raging wind and not in this quiet, warm garden.

She turns then and her eyes, tormenting eyes, are glued to the iron lantern on the island. She stares at it for a long time, as if it is some God drawing her away from life.

I have lost her momentarily, but I do not try to reclaim her. I go along with her mood, ask her about the lantern, if it has any meaning or bearing on her life.

"Lantern steeped in tradition," she answers sadly, and she escorts me over the arched red bridge
and we stand before it. "Great grandfather, Tara
Ishihara, come from Hiroshima many years ago,
build house, build wall, plant garden. Iron lantern
come from Kofukuji temple, old temple of Grandfather's childhood—lantern family heirloom, donated to temple by great great Grandfather, Tara
Kegon, temple priest. Fire never go out, burn forever, fire responsibility handed down generation
after generation by head of family. My responsibil-

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ity now."

I study the fantastically wrought lantem with amazement, my conquest of this alluring, seductive Japanese girl momentarily forgotten, and I ask:

"It has never gone out, after all these many years?"

She answers readily, enjoying my interest in it.

"Fire never go out, even during war, even when bombs shake up Tokyo, fire burn. Papa-San never forget to put in coals. Mama-San and Papa-San die here by lantern, warm souls before entering paradise."

Suddenly I feel a great tenderness for this strange girl who, despite modern times, strives to keep about her the essence of old family ties, ancient traditions and, placing an arm around her shoulders I ask:

"It means a lot to you, doesn't it, Hanna—you and Rasha."

"When I see fire in lantern from house at night, sometimes Erik, I come down and place hands on flames. Rasha sometimes too. Then, seems like Mama-San and Papa-San here too, alive to sit beside us. Never let lantern go out, Erik, never!"

"You're a brave girl, Hanna. You deserve the

"Hanna not bad girl, Erik, Hanna good girl-

I swallow hard as a lump rises to my throat.
"I never doubted that," I return, sincerely.
"Hanna save self for mind.

"Hanna save self for right man—never give self

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like other cheap Japanese girls."

I vowed determinedly to change all that.

"Am I the right man?"

Her shiny, doll-like face lifts to mine and her slanting eyes in the bright sunlight are round pools of illumination.

"I don't know, Erik," she answers, and the sound of her low voice is like a far off melody. "See so many things dirty soldiers do, makes me think all Americans have filthy minds, want to do nothing else but lie in bed with Japanese girl, then dirty soldier leave Japan, Japanese girl have child, disgraced!"

I lift an eyebrow. She is too factual for my comfort. Yet I realized she was telling the truth. The American Soldier stationed all over the world was making bad impressions on the natives; conquerors taking the spoils, running pell-mell over the cities and villages, using their soldiers' pay and their victorious influence as a tool to take advantage of some who were powerless to resist. I understood her objective and I admired her for holding her ground yet I want her so desperately. I want her so much that I too, like the others before me, am immoral enough to have her, despite the consequences, regardless of her life after I am gone.

I look down at her, into the liquid depths of her haunting eyes, see this frail, shy creature battling for her rights as an individual, so defenseless in so callous a world, and I suddenly feel pity for her. I want to take her into my arms, lay her tiny

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doll-like face against my chest, want to shield her forever from the invasion of carnal immorality. And I wonder that, if I am lucky to have her body at last, what will become of her in the future if I have unlocked her virginity, if I have set her on that dark winding road into anarchy-like hundreds of other girls in Japan, and when I am gone will she go to other men, or other American Soldiers and Marines and Sailors who want her for a night's pleasure? I shudder at the thought. And I know now that if I am to have her, to win her, then I must also win her heart and her mind.

Lifting her chin I kiss her tenderly on the mouth and I feel her tiny body tremble against mine,

"I'll never disgrace you," I promise, and my lips find hers again, molten, maddeningly.

"Please, Erik," she sighs, stepping back, my arms obediently falling. "Come-let me show you the house."

I follow her up the flaming walk and into the house which, as other Japanese homes, is dominated by simplicity. Here, architecture has made the interior timeless, and these rooms could have been exactly like this a hundred years ago, as well as today, or sometime in the future. Tatami, or matting, of light tan covers the floors from wall to wall, and here and there stands a lacquered urn, black on red or black on yellow, the ikebana, or flower arrangement stylized to the ultimate in floral artistry. Screens, made of rice paper and lacquered to the gleaming polish of fish-skin, form partitions for

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rooms and for sliding doors, and they are painted scenes which magnificently bring cherryblossom trees, bamboo alcoves, Mt. Fiji, and the Torii magically indoors.

She instructs me to take off my boots at the entrance in exchange for a pair of zoris, or sandals, and she escorts me from room to room or, rather, through a maze of screens and sliding partitions.

The bath is a room within itself, floored with white tile squares, a pool in one corner about five foot in depth, with low stools for soaping and cedar buckets for dousing. Flowered towels hang from the mouths of gold-leafed fish on the wall, and there is an enormous low table littered with smelly tonsorial applications.

Her bedroom, has a low, black lacquered dressing or make-up dresser with a round mirror centering a white screen on which a spray of lotus blossoms are painted in shocking pink. Her bedroom is unusual in that the bed is sindai, or above the floor—very similar to American beds. It is flat though, very hard looking, with a cylindrical pillow across its width; a black silk spread and canopied on all four sides by a silk, hose-thin drape the color of cedar with red pull cords and gold striped tassels.

She detects my interest in it and explains.

"It is an ancient design, eighth century, and was used in the Japanese movie, Yoso. Family visit movie studio one time. I see sindai. I like. Papa-San buy for me."

We visit Rasha's bedroom last and I am sur-

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prised to see how littered it is with American manufactured articles.

"I thought he hated Americans," I said, questioningly as I study the stacks of American record albums, movie star magazines, a Confederate cap, a Confederate sword, a Confederate flag draped like a shrine on one wall, a panda, two teddy bears.

Hanna answers, apologetically.

"Rasha hate American people, not American things. Rasha love very much old South, war between states." She giggles. "Rasha wear cap, take sword and flag, sometime play soldier."

"General Lee—eh?" I ask, smiling warmly. Rasha and I have more in common than we realize.

She nods her head.

"Rasha like southern belle too, girl in hoop skirt."

"He's my boy then," I say musing. "Rasha and I are going to get along swell."

She gazes at me soberly.

"I hope so, Erik."

I notice the new record player sitting beside the stack of accumulated records, thoughtfully placed there by Hanna and, with a prayer, I hope that he will use it.

"You could be very good for Rasha," she continues in her low, quiet voice, which holds so much attraction for me. "You talk very much to him about old south—you win his heart, Erik. Rasha no have male companion—need someone to speak with him like Papa-San."

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"You just leave everything to me," I say, gloating over my progress with her. "I'll make Rasha like me if I have to take him to the United States with me."

"Ooh! Rasha like that!" Then she looks seriously at me. "Take me to United States too, Erik?"

"I'll take both you, adopt you," I promise, kissing her lightly.

"Me like adoption," she cries happily, and she misunderstands. I have other plans for her. "You call me Hanna Shanon?"

"I'll call you Scarlett O'Hara if you like."

She frowns.

"Me no like Scarlett O'Hara. Her white trash hussy. Me like Melanie—good high class southern belle."

I grin.

"Okay. I'll call you Melanie then."

Like a butterfly she flits about the room, takes a charcoal gray robe from Rasha's closet, emerald green towels, and motions for me to follow her. She takes me into the bathroom.

"Today festival day for boys," she giggles. "You take off clothes while I go cut Iris blossoms. Hanna give you shobu-yu bath, sprinkle Iris in bath water, make you good and healthy."

I hesitate momentarily. I am modest, but not to a fault. I had been reared under the assumption that nudism is immoral, but I was more than willing to alter that assumption. I had heard some of the Marines at the Embassy discussing the public

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baths here in Tokyo which they had patronized relating that both male and females bathed together in the nude, but somehow I had never summoned enough courage to go.

She leaves to go and cut iris blossoms from the garden and, as quickly as I can, I peel off my clothes and slip into the pool. She is back in a minute, her arms loaded with long stemmed iris blooms which she tosses into the water. Then she strips, carefully laying each garment aside silently, without embarrassment, until she stands naked before me. The sunlight, streaming in through the white frosty screens, turns her into an orchid. She is utterly without blemish, glowing with the subdued haze of ivory. She slips the long celluloid ornaments from her hair, which look like shiny tea pot handles, and her long black hair cascades to her waist.

"Are you happy, Erik?" she asks impishly, as she turns coquettishly and eases into the water beside me.

Am I happy? What a question!

"You have fine body, Erik," she flatters, as she breaks some of the Iris blossoms and crushes them against my shoulders. "Like Steve Reeves in Hercules Unchained."

"Not quite," I correct her, for I had seen the movie and I had neither the bulk nor the dimensions. But I was well proportioned, my flesh fit tightly over the bone, and I was, though small of frame, a miniature of Reeves at perhaps his age

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sixteen.

She becomes very playful with this boy's festival nitual, our water-slick bodies rubbing more often than I could stand and remain with all my faculties and, before I realize what is happening (for my head is reeling) we are out of the pool, our bodies plastered with Iris petals, and onto her black silk sindai.

It is all too much, and I realize, in ecstasy, that I will never have enough. Her wet, ivory body, her breasts like delicate magnolia buds, her long, wet mane of hair, her arms, her soft thighs, softer than duck's down, has sparked the flame within me, and I know it will create a fire which I will not have the fortitude to quench.

I enter her with all the pent up drive of my intense longing, and there is nothing now but the doing and, suddenly, in this paper room, beneath this cedar veil which curtains Tokyo, which obliterates Japan, this is mine and Hanna's world, alone.

Later, how much later I will never know (for what is time when it is measured in paradise?) we lie relaxed in each others arms, her long wet lashes brushing flushed cheeks, and she whispers frantically, almost frantically.

"Me no virgin anymore, Erik!" And she begans

This is my cue to smother her once again in the cradle of my arms, to slip my throbbing body again over hers, to press my burning lips on her lips, her face, the nape of her neck.

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"Thanks," I whisper through the muffling of my kisses. "You have given me the most precious thing one person can give to another, your innocence, which you can give only once."

"Oh, Erik," she sobs, brokenly, hysterically, her breath coming in short, jerky grasps. "You do appreciate-you do have a heart, don't you, Erik?"

"Yes," I whisper. "And now it is yours."

Finally, we drag our bodies half-heartedly from bed, slip into robes and sandals and she prepares a much-needed meal.

We sit on scarlet pillows before a low charcoal burner, or hibachi, and she serves tofu and tempura on elaborate porcelain plates of black and red. This is done in silence, and I watch her hands. Japanese hands are another exclusive expression. As delicate as a child's, her hands become her soul's sensible indicator. We eat in silence, and with an uneasiness I sense she strongly feels, or is it guilt? Our meal is followed by hot tea, which she serves like an accomplished O-cha-no-yo. Then she plays on the tsuzumi "to entertain me," and later we play a game of poem cards. When this is over she shows me the Tango No Sekko doll she has made for me.

"Doll really Samurai doll," she informs, holding it out for my inspection. "Good for man to have."

"Do you think I have earned it now?" I ask jokingly, taking the doll and holding it out at arms length so that I can scrutinize its every detail. "That I have become a man?"

She blushes.

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"Very much man, Erik," she murmurs, and her voice trembles oddly.

The doll is almost two feet high, definitiely male by its facial expression, and is attired in a delicately stitched haori which hangs thickly about his shoulders and wraps around to his feet. Complete to the last detail, it boasts white socks with forked toes and black zoris. Even a tiny brass samurai sword hangs from his side by a red sash and delicate red and green dragons are embroidered on his black silk kimono.

"Thanks, Hanna," I say, delighted. "I will keep it always."

She looks away remorsefully, scans with tearnimmed eyes the screen opposite me, beyond me, where a painting of the miniature ming tree, or bonsai, dominates one complete wall.

"It is done now," she utters hoarsely. "Finished!" And her eyes drag toward mine where they lock and hold.

"What is done?" I ask puzzled. I set the doll on the floor.

"It is over," she answers in a fierce lament, her voice fatally final, absolute. "You get what you want. You too get Tango No Sekko doll. You go now, maybe?"

"Hanna! Hanna!" I cry in protest, taking her hands in mine and lifting her to her feet. "It isn't finished. It's just the beginning! I'm not going ever. I love you. I'll never leave you—never. Do you understand?"

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She nods. She lowers her eyes demurely.

"Then you stay here at house with Rasha and me?"

"Yes-if you want me to stay."

"You go back and forth to American Embassy for guard duty? You come back here to eat and sleep—like American husband?"

"Yes-yes!"

"Good, Erik, I like that, but ..." Her eyes are stormy again with an undefined turbulence. "But Rasha—what about Rasha?"

I try and think.

"We'll find a way, Hanna. We'll think of something. He'll get use to it in time."

"Rasha be ashamed of sister. Me no virgin, now. Me break old and trusted tradition. Rasha never break tradition. He save self for wife.

I stand listening to her, entangled now in her bewildering problems, her eternal battle against the old and the new, the amoral and the immoral, and I search desperately for an answer, any plausible answer which can set our future pattern right, one on which we three can live harmoniously together. I know now (and how I know this I am not sure) that we three need one another, that the magnet of our individual personalities, which are amazingly similar, drags at two opposite poles of thought—our vast difference in custom, in religion, in that we are, basically, enemies. As a conqueror I demand and, as images of defeat, they are rebellious of, compromise. So we are torn by the irreconcilable

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two, needing one another desperately but veering outward through restraints we cannot name.

"Hanna," I say quietly, my own voice drowned with passion. "If we went down to the lantern, if we said a few words maybe, a few sacred words. Would you feel better? Like a marriage ceremony."

"Maybe that help, Erik," she answers, and we leave the house and go quickly down the flagstone path and cross the scarlet bridge to where the lantern stands, as it has stood for hundreds of years.

It is dark now, the sky is brilliant with stars, and a gentle breeze from the Pacific dances through the cherry blossoms, sprinkling pink confetti down upon us. The lantern glows red, the coals like tiny bright eyes of live things stab at me through the darkness.

She kneels, takes my hand in hers while I remain, standing and her lips move with a cadence unknown to the American mind, for she speaks in Japanese.

I do not know what she is saying but I flatter myself in believing that she is calling on her God to alter his vengeance against her, and to mend, if he sees fit, the fragments of the life-pattern she has broken.

She takes her hand from mine, then places her hands and mine against the metal. The warmth floods through me, flees like lightning to my heart.

A harsh thudding sound comes from the iron gate. A voice pierces the night air.

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"Hanna!"

We turn abruptly and look around. It is Rasha!

He comes slowly up the flagstone path. He is limping badly on a crude improvised crutch. His face is pale and his eyes burn like the candle-lit eyes in paper dragons.

"Hanna! You break honored tradition!" he half screams, which sends Hanna, shaking like a leaf into my arms. "You allow dirty American Marine inside walls, inside sacred house of Papa-San and Mama-San! Korosu!"

Those last words leap through the darkness and cling to my memory. I knew now who my assailant was my first night in Tokyo.

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CHAPTER FOUR

I look at this cursing boy coming up the walk, his face enraged, his soul rampant with embittered rebellion and, holding Hanna close, I cry out to her beseechingly:

"For God's sake! What is he saying?"

"Kill! Kill! she answers in fright, and her upturned face in the darkness is tormented and twisted with terror.

Rasha is abreast of us now, centering the little red bridge and his eyes are the same eyes of Japs I have seen in the islands of the Pacific, peering savagely at me from block-house and fox-hole. They are the unmistakable eyes of a killer, the kind of insane killer who will destroy or be destroyed, who will try to conquer if it means his own destruction.

He pauses like a wild animal on the bow of the bridge, as if uncertain to go on, and he glares directly at Hanna, his eyes naked with pain.

"Hanna! Hanna! How could you?" he cries, his voice wracked with child-like sobs. "You wear kimono and he wear haori. You been in sindai together, you wallow with American pig. You warui, like dirty Japanese girls at Queen Bee bar. You whore!"

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"Rasha!" Hanna gasps, faintly.

At that I go blind with rage. Like lightning I charge, unwary of his karate professionalism, thoughtless that he is but a mere kid. He braces for the attack, his legs instantly spread substantially apart. His lips cut a jagged line across his face as he screams hysterically, the wild charging call of karate, and I know instinctively that nothing will satisfy him but the sight of fresh blood. With all my might I strike him across the face with the back of my fist, using my hardened knuckles as a weapon. In that same instant he has brought up his crutch in a wide arc to strike me down, but he never gets a chance to deal the blow. He shrieks, falls back on his wounded leg, losing his balance. He topples backward into the pool. There is a splash. Hanna, sobbing, motions for me to help him. I drag him, spitting and coughing, from the water. The dousing cools his rage. He stands a dripping, humiliated warrior, a doll warrior in a puppet tragedy.

"You dirty American fighter!" he swears, shaking a wet finger at me. "You no fight clean, honest-togoodness fight. You hit young Japanese boy who wounded!"

"I didn't hurt you—nothing but your pride," I say, half in apology. I had not wanted it this way, and with a degree of shame I was sorry it happened. But my wrath comes back as I see Hanna beside us, her tiny body trembling like a frightened deer. I give Rasha a sharp eye. "Don't you ever call

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your sister names again. If you do, you'll answer to me. Hanna is a good girl. Don't you ever forget it."

He pouts, and wiggles his jaw as if I have broken it.

"Hanna take up with American Marine-with enemy!"

"I'm not your enemy, Rasha. I'm your friend."

"No friend. No want friends who try and ruin sister."

Hanna eases toward him, like a trainer with a wild cat. She lays a tremulous hand on his drenched chest.

"You wrong about Erik," she says, soothingly. "Erik good soldier, not like other soldier who come to Tokyo."

With no other defiance, he glares down at her, his face darkly grim, his lips set tightly over a bridge of white teeth.

"You still virgin?"

Sinking to her knees, she wraps her arms around his naked legs. Her long black hair is suddenly in wild tangles about her frantic face, a face from which all calm has fled, and her imploring eyes are the saddest eyes I am ever to see.

"Rasha, too late to lie," she gasps, choking on

the words. "No longer virgin."

"He ruin you then!" his eyes blaze anew. "You

no more my sister!"

She begins to weep openly, tears of humiliation and shame, their silver lines making twin streams down her sad uplifted face.

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The sight rakes at my heart like claws.

"Rasha—Rasha, my little brother," she pleads, lifting her arms so that she might pull him down to her, frantic arms like the arms of a victim climbing out of a precipice. "Hanna still your sister. Erik—Erik love me, want to take care of us, want to live here in house like one big happy family. Please, Rasha, Erik make us both very happy."

He blinks, sniffs spasmodically, flagging at another turn of action, of rebellion. He has been brought to bay and he knows—though he may never admit it, even to himself—that he has lost a battle, if not the whole war. He cuts a wickedly bright eye at me, then looks down at her, and there is a hint of sadness in his voice as he whispers:

"You love him, Hanna?"

She looks at him, then at me forgivingly. She begs with her eyes, fearing to answer.

"Yes, Rasha," she answers finally, as if he is offering the world to her, a forbidden world which he alone can give or refuse.

"Hanna love Erik very much—Erik love me—I think!"

"You happy, Sister-happy with this American gook?"

She chokes. She buries her face in his wet legs. "Yes—very happy!"

Irritated that she should prostrate herself before this ungrateful kid, this demanding Imperialist who possesses the mind of a kamikazi fanatic, I take her by the arm and lift her slowly to her feet.

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"Don't let me ever see you on your hands and knees again, Hanna," I demand harshly, and I shake her until her long dark hair sails about her like witches locks. "You do not have to get on your knees and beg him for what is rightfully yours—the liberty to choose who you want to love."

She steps back, both puzzled and frightened.

"Japanese girl not like American girl, Erik," she cries, her tortured face filled with indecision.

"You're going to live your life, and Rasha is going to live his." I give him a baleful glance. "And we three are going to make out together. There's going to be no more of this old tradition, this dirty American stuff, and this playing war-lord, understand?" I shake them both. They nod but in superstitious fear. "Now come you two. Let's quit this foolish talk and get Rasha into some dry clothes and tend his leg."

With one arm around her and the other supporting the sniffing kid, I half-drag them up the flag-stone walk and into the lantern-lit interior. Taking a dry towel, I wipe his body then prop him up on a mountain of silk pillows. I instruct Hanna to bring strips of cloth for bandages, then I turn my attention to the wounded leg.

"Son of bitch karate instructor twist leg out of socket," he complains, still sniffing bitter tears as I lift his short, but well-shaped leg to the lantern light and examine his ankle. "That's why me come home two days ahead of time. Next time have karate class me kick instructor all the way across

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gym, bump head on gong."

"You mighty tough," I remark, giving him a smile. "But you can't whip the world, Rasha my boy. Let somebody help you."

"Ankle broken maybe," he cries as his spirit lifts on the tide of my flattery, and he flinches over-dramatically as I twist his leg back and forth. "Maybe lay up in bed three or four weeks, not work, you pay bills, you buy food, me be master of house."

"Nothing of the sort," I say, deflating his ego as quickly as I had inflated it. "Just a slight sprain. You'll be up and dancing the kabuki in no time."

His eyes sparkle on mine hatefully.

"You make nasty joke-eh?"

"Yes, I make nasty joke. Want to do something about it?"

He keeps his silence, but his lips stick out an inch.

Hanna returns with an arm loaded with white linen strips, looking a little abashed over my reproving her, and they both watch intently as I bandage his ankle. I examine his jaw where I struck him, a little ashamed that I had to do something like this to a kid, even though he had it coming. I work his mouth back and forth roughly.

He blinks but camouflages his pain with a reluc-

"You can take a punch like a man," I tease, nudging him playfully under the chin. "You and I are going to make it after all."

Hanna brings in the record player and holds it

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out to him.

"Yours, Rasha-gift from Erik. It pleases?"

"I no play it," he stammers, trying to be stubborn, but his eyes are alight with admiration for it. "Hope it cost you five thousand yen, break you. Hope sales girl no take back—you lost money. Hope you have put on junk pile."

"I'll give it to some other nice Japanese boy, then," I suggest, baiting him. He fixes his eyes on the wall, his face stubborn.

"Okay—if make you happy—I take," he returns, tartly, "but I no play. Keep in room—get dusty!"

I look at him for a long moment, trying to fathom the depths of his aloofness. The dim light on his smooth, unblemished face accents a hand-someness which, I admit after a moment, is really beauty, in a way. Beautiful and rebellious. As I look, I have the feeling of his beauty growing in my eyes—a sensuous beauty, like a word of antique art. It is a purely physical face having none of the serene composure of an intellectual. His is a totally sensual face, I find myself realizing—a timeless, ageless face. His is the face of a savage—yet unmistakably, the face of a prince.

I bow my head against some other thoughts which are trying to force through—thoughts in which the bodies of Hanna and Rasha are somehow tangled. I push them aside, with a strange apprehension.

"Do with it what you want, Rasha. Just re-

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member, though—I made the gesture and I want you to enjoy it."

"Maybe I play on birthday," he offers in compromise. "Hanna bake rice cake, have candles, icecream—you drink much sake, get looped like other United States wine heads. But first, check price of record player—see how much rich American Marine really like Tara Rasha."

That's always the way it goes—the measure of regard is the sum of the dollars and cents spent to express it. I lean back on the silk pillows, suddenly painfully lonely in this lacquered room. Hanna senses my unhappiness and bends consolingly above me.

"Apologize for bad night, Erik. Apologize for bad mannered kid brother. You angry?"

I look up slowly, see her dark eyes framed in the glossy, black hair, her glowing complexion accented by her apple green kimono, and I pull her down onto the pillows beside Rasha and me, my arm instantly going around her.

"No, I'm not angry," I answer her, kissing her on the nose in front of Rasha, unconsciously testing his reactions. For some odd reason he takes it in stride.

"We want you to be happy," she laments, "Rasha and me—don't we, Rasha?"

"Maybe," he comes back choppily.

"We're all three happy together," I add, genuinely hopeful. And I take Rasha's hand and lock all our hands together.

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Though we cling but momentarily, fleetingly, each slowly receding back to one's own person, I feel that something deep has tapped the hardened, inaccessible core within us. Subconsciously we are all three alike, searching for the same thing-love -yet each in a different way, and upon different roads. That these roads may join one day to me, at the moment, seems questionable, though somewhat hopeful. I see time itself as a barrier, the most uncertain of uncertainties. Where will I be a month from now? Six months from now? Surely as a Marine I did not expect to remain indefinitely at any one location for long. It had been pack and move ever since the day I joined, back during that long, half-forgotten year of 1942, worlds and worlds away. A thousand years it seemed.

Now, how strange it seems somehow, sitting here with these two—people I hardly know, actually, sharing their lives, allowing them to share something of mine. Only a few months ago I was fighting these Japanese, flushing them out of foxholes on Guam, taking them prisoner on Iwo Jima, killing them, passing over those already dead to kill again. And now in this amber room, from every nook and cranny I see snatches of things which pull at my memory, paper fans on the battlefield, a pair of dark blue silk forked shoes sitting in a corner which are the exact replicas of a thousand pairs I had seen scattered over trench and dug-out, chop sticks balanced against a half eaten bowl of rice, and I had seen literally thousands and thousands of

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these, in bivouac on Guadalcanal, in hospital tents on Bougainville, in thatched roofed huts on Guam, in the bomb torn village of Motoyama on Iwo Jima—all the paraphernalia that goes with a marching army and with a race.

Now as I look about me in this glazed room, this immaculate doll's house of porcelain and ivory, of bamboo and lacquer, I see relics of my past, trophies of the enemy which I had spent the last ten years fighting, if not physically, then in my mind. Now, strangely, I love that same enemy, love him with the identical fervor with which I had hated all these years.

I look at them in the golden light, at their dark hair, their liquid eyes, their petite bodies curled up on the gaudy pillows, and I see the change within myself. Yes—my heart was changing. And I think: If I can change, after all that has happened to me, then they can change too.

"What you gloomy about, Erik?" Hanna asked child-like, and with a child-like interest, tilting her head so that she has to look at me from the top of her eyes.

"Oh—the war, I guess," I answer quietly, though not wanting to bring up the subject. I did not want to put them both in a fever of rebellion which seemed the case whenever the war or an American was mentioned.

Her face becomes a mask of delicate concern and she eases a notch closer to me. I see deep wonder and curiosity blazing like bright suns in her dark

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eyes. By that one word, "war," I see that I have ignited a new interest within her.

"Was it so bad, Erik?" she stammers, and her lower lip trembles.

"No-not really," I shrug.

"Did you fight, like real soldier," Rasha implores with a hint of mockery, skeptical I am certain, "or did you go through war in pretty dress uniform guarding flags and tombs and old generals?"

I lift an eyebrow. I started, impulsively to rattle off battle and skirmish, campaign after campaign, island upon island I had helped to take, but I am reluctant to share anything so personal with this impersonal kid. So I say with tongue in cheek:

"That about sizes it up, Rasha. A boy scout really."

He enjoys this.

"Big, tough Marine-Ha! Ha!"

Hanna bends over me.

"You only make joke—ah so, Erik?" she cries, and her face is set in seriousness. "Hanna know better. I know only Marines at Embassy veterans of over sea duty. You fight in Pacific—hard fighting, no?"

I bow my head, study for a moment the bright shine of my cordovan boots. I do not want to bring up the subject of my own personal experiences, to up-root the stink and fear of the past by telling them all I had done to the Japs, to tell them all the Japs had done to me—in fear of their remorse, and in fear of their pity. And, God knows, I did not in fear of their pity. And, God knows, I did not

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want their pity.

"Please!" Hanna cries, her hand on my am insistent. "Erik, I got to know—got to know everything!"

Suddenly, with a surge of emotion, long pent against release, I blurt out everything. I tell them about the Jap air raids on the Island of Guadalcanal, retaliation raids in honor of the death of the Emperor's son; about the Nanking raiders in the slimy jungle war-fare during the monsoon season on Bougainville; of the terrorizing banzai attacks on Guam; of the maddening, pulsating, mind unhinging raids on Iwo Jima. I tell it all, the suicide attacks which killed hundreds on both armies, the treacherous torturing of captured Marines, the wasteful harakiri, the utter doom of those trapped in caves on the northern strip of Iwo Jima during the final stages of the campaign, preferring to remain sealed in by bull-dozers rather than to surrender and live.

They were so still while I talked one could hear a pin drop. They were all ears, and heart too. I imagine. I finish by telling them about my best friend who was killed on Iwo Jima far beyond the front lines in a place called Cushman's Pocket.

"We had settled for the night," I begin, a little more comfortable now that I had told the worst. "Cisco and I were the last ones of a five man patrol, three others getting killed when we had to cross an open space near Motoyoma Air Field Number Two. It was about dark, and we found a

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by the Japs, which they used as a tank trail. There was a sharp, diagonal curve in the trench and Cisco eased around to explore the other side before we settled for the night. There was a cave beyond, directly in front of the trench, and there before the entrance of the cave was a Jap sniper. He was in a small hole dug in the ground and in front of him was a Nambu machine gun."

Rasha pounds one fist into the other. His face has on it the avid curiosity of a monkey's.

"It was dark and Cisco could not see," I go on, more somberly in my tone of voice, my mind going back through those hateful years to that time, and I was living it all over again for a second time. "The Jap sniper shot him five times in the gut before he could pull the trigger of his carbine . . ."

Rasha leaps to his feet, his face twisting with sharp pain as he forgets his wounded ankle, his emotions loosened like water over a dam.

"Did you kill him, Erik?" he half-screams, his voice guttural, the words coming in short, uncontrolled gasps. "Did you kill no good, dirty sniper?"

His youthful mind has lost its keel. He no longer knows whose side he is on. It's just as well. The kid's suffered enough.

"I heard the shots, then ran to Cisco who was flopping in the sand," I continue, ignoring him, ignoring too Hanna's tortured eyes. "He was dead almost before I reached him, his voice so low I could not understand what he was trying to tell

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me."

Rasha is beyond control now, almost hysterical. He leaps up and down, flinging his arms wildly. He cannot wait to hear the rest.

"Did you kill sorry, rat-eyed, no good, dirty sniper?" he cries, demands in his frantic mind that I kill him in the story he has already lived to the highest pitch of his tangled emotions. That he wants revenge for Cisco, a Marine he has never seen, is apparent by his shaking of the entire house as he leaps and pivots like one gone mad. He is up in arms suddenly for something he cannot understand. Yet, he is not at variance with his nature, and for this reason I nod.

"Yes, I killed him," I said, flatly.

"Glad dirty sniper dead!" he sighs, heaving himself upon the pillows beside me. "Him kill Cisco, your good friend. Glad no good, sneaky sniper get it good!"

"Oh, so sorry, Erik," Hanna tries to comfort me. "Have terrible time in war—I not know. Both sides very, very wicked!"

I look at her with enlightened and genuine fondness, thinking how infinitely dear she is to me, think how truthful are her properly timed words. And I answer:

"Yes, Hanna. Both were wicked. I'm glad it is over."

She nods her head wearily, as if the burden of both armies weighed upon her small shoulders. And she stares off into the distance, as though seeing it

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all again, and seeing, cannot throw if off.

"Where Cisco buried, Erik?" Rasha asks solemn-

ly, his bland face molded into a profile of gloom.

"On Iwo Jima, at the foot of Mt. Suribachi."

He hesitates.

"He your best friend, Erik?"

I nod gravely, and I think sorrowfully on those four years with him, day and night, fighting with him in every campaign, and that last night when I remain with him in Cushman's Pocket.

"Friends like Cisco come to some men only once in a lifetime," I say to him. "To most, never."

He toys with one of the silken tassels on the pillow beneath him. He is in a struggle for words, with his emotions in chaos.

"I would like very much if we could be friends like that," I whisper, reading his thoughts.

"Maybe," is all he answers. He is stubborn to

"Now you have no one but Rasha and me,"
Hanna cried defiantly, her eyes tipped with a tiny
triumph.

"Where your Mama-San and Papa-San?" Rasha asks. They are so curious, so filled with questions, not superficially but genuinely concerned about my past. Or, I think perhaps involved in an individual search for their own foothold in a topsy-turvy world; trying to parallel their position with that of another life.

"They—died at Pearl Harbor," I answer after a pause, remembering with a sensation bitter as gall,

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that awful time. It was the reason I joined the Marines, in the first place—an urge, born of anger and hate to strike back at an enemy which had plunged my life into a state of bereft anarchy.

Amazement is written on their faces as they look first at each other, then back to me.

"Pearl Harbor!" they cry, together.

"My sister lived there with her husband, a Navy lieutenant. They went out, shortly after they were married," I explain, trying to sort my jumbled recollections into a chronological order for them. "Later—soon after I got out of high school—they invited my parents to visit them. It wasn't long after Mom and Dad got to Hawaii that the Japs—ah—your army fliers bombed Pearl. My father was killed instantly and my—my mother died shortly afterward."

"Your sister?" Hanna asks imploringly.

"No one knows," I answered bitterly. "Her husband went down on the U.S.S. Arkansas and no one knows what became of Lily."

"You think she dead?" Hanna asked, tears of mixed sorrow and guilt welling in her eyes, her face reflecting misery.

I look at her, recalling the agonizing months I spent trying to trace her; then not knowing whether she was alive or dead.

"I think so," I answered, wearily. "I wrote the Army, the Navy—everybody. I wrote for months. I sent letters to my Congressman, my Senator; the Secretaries of the Navy and War—even the Presi-

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dent." I twisted at the memory of the bitter, futile, fuitless months and the endless letters.

Hanna sighed, as though afraid to speak, her शृक्ष big on mine; Rasha breathed: "Roo," softly, shaking his head as if in disbelief that the highlyorganized United States could lose track of even one of its own. Who could know what happened? She might have been blown to bits in the hail of high explosive the Jap planes poured onto the island.

"Finally," I went on, "I just gave it up. No one could discover any trace of her and something inside me told me it wasn't any use to try any longer. I just seemed to know Lily no longer exsted. If she were still alive, I feel, somehow, I would sense it. She's dead."

"Oh, my poor Erik," Hanna cries in a deep upwelling of sorrow. She melts into a delicate little heap beside me, her eyes like two bright candle flames in a naughty world.

I glance at Rasha and see, in his flame-mirrored eyes, a deep regret for what has happened to me. His defiance and rebellions are quenched, for the moment. He looks trapped, guilty, self-accused and self-judged, the slump of his broad shoulders indicating he has come to the end of some sort of struggle within. Perhaps my story has shown him the things he fought against seeing and at last recognizes that he must find his place in the Japan which exists today—not as he wishes it to exist.

Both feel, I can sense, as though they bear guilt

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for the conflict; as though they'd taken part in the massacres, the enslavements, the brutality—that I have known it, all along, and hold it against them. I search my mind for the words to unlock their fetters.

"But this must be forgotten," I say, knowing I can never do so but may ease their burden. "Life is ahead, not behind us. We three must find a way; not my way nor your ancestral way—but a new way to exist in friendship and trust."

Sudden relief sweeps over their silent faces like a light turned up in the darkness, and they rise, calling it a day.

Hutons, thin silken mattresses, are unrolled on the mat flooring in Rasha's bedroom, which I am to share, though I long to sleep with Hanna. Undressing, we stretch out in the sub-luminous darkness. The street noises do not reach us here, barricaded by the stone wall and the muffling shrubs in the garden, and I lie long into the night thinking of small inconsequential events which have led me to this hour.

Though I think Rasha is asleep on the pallet next to me, unexpectedly his hand finds mine, closes over it, and he whispers a soft suggestion.

"Rasha be good friend like Cisco, if you want,

"I want," I answer drowsily. I thank God for this reunion and peace. Rasha withdraws his hand, as if to say he is well pleased, and I turn toward the wall and gaze sadly through the darkness at that

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paper wall which separates me from Hanna.

A little before dawn I get up, slip into my haori and zoris and go out into the garden. The moon is full, its reflection like a huge festive lantern of white rice paper in the lacquered pool, and the chill of the dew drenched dawn cools my feverish body.

Then from the house I heard the soft strains of music. It is the unmistakable tune of "The Wheel of Fortune." I smile faintly to myself.

Rasha is using his record player.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Tonight, dressed in my gray silk haori, I sit Buddha-fashion in the living room of the house on the hill, whiling my time away thumbing through a deck of poem cards. Having abandoned the old ways of life, the past to which I can never return, I have exiled myself to the Japanese way of life.

I have moved my things from the Marine wing of the Embassy and into Rasha's bedroom. It makes no difference to the Marine Commander so long as I report for duty on time and in proper uniform. A number of the other marines have long since gone to permanent quarters somewhere in Tokyo, taking up domestic life with Japanese girls. We rarely see one another now, except during the changing of the guard, or for brief hellos along the Ginza.

Hanna is sitting near me, busy decorating theater wigs with an array of flowers and plastic ornaments. About her is strewn silken material for costumes, and she is in a sea of color: tangerine, emerald, yellow, violet and black. At intervals she looks at me and smiles, or asks my opinion of one of the finished head pieces she will wear later in the Kabukiza theater dance.

On the other side of me, completely contented, is Rasha. He is sprawled on his stomach on a mattress

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of pillows. He is naked, save for a white thousand stitch belt which goes around his middle with a width of about a foot and a narrow strip between his legs. The belt is mazed with symbolic writings for good luck, one stitch each made by some devoted friend. It brings sharply to mind the many times I have seen such belts on the Japs the Manines had taken prisoner in the islands.

These belts had always been the object of much searching by the Marines as souvenirs to take back home with them. Always filthy, having been worn months, even years, by the Japenese soldiers who considered them good luck charms, they were taken off their dead bodies and boiled in water in order to make them clean. But this belt Rasha is wearing is as white as snow, and over it is tied his black belt which he won earlier at the karate tournament. Hanna and I had gone to the competition and, I must admit, this kid is a master of the art. There was none there greater, in my opinion and the dedication to this form of defense, his almost religious fanaticism, is a noble sight to watch. Though his ankle was still slightly sore, he had performed wonderfully; sometimes I think because I sat in the audience, and he made a heroic figure in his white karate uniform with the black family crest over his heart. I have seen him, too, dance in the Kabukiza theater dressed as a female and performing a female role and the transformation was to me nothing short of astounding. With his face painted chalk white, adorned with a fantastic wig, and at-

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tired in a brightly colored kimono, he had embodied the essence of femininity even more than those of real women, even Hanna herself; for at times her gestures were masculine. I completely forgot however, that he was the solidly-built boy I see sprawled on the pillows, his grimacing, his bowing, his demure frontage, and in retrospect, I thought him more beautiful than a real girl.

This too (as do all Kabuki performers), this kid takes seriously. He is dedicated to his art, and can be as fussy over the selection of material for a costume, the trappings on a wig, or the long applications of make-up as any woman. Yet, once the performance is over he can return in a flash to his present masculine orientation.

Though Kabuki is a far cry different than anything I had ever seen state-side, I had observed female impersonators back home and they had been as feminine off-stage as on. Not so in Japan. This kid could parallel, in masculinity, any football hero on the gridiron, but could go into a Jane Russell once the stage lights were dimmed.

He is absorbed in a copy of "Gone with the Wind," and he emphasizes his avid interest frequently with a jab of his hard fists into one of the pillows, or with a guttural outcry of: "Dirty Yankee!"

I had found a copy one day while browsing a bookstore on the Ginza. Knowing how much he loved battles of the Confederacy, I bought him a copy. Too, I was trying to win his favor. The book

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is translated into Japanese and, oddly, on the back of the dust jacket contains a picture of the authoress, her eyes slanted by the touch-up brush of some dever Japanese photographer.

Since I have moved into the house I have taken over, more to their joy-I think-than mine. They seem glad to be relieved of the agitating responsibility, the duties too demanding on their time and too heavily pressing on their too-young shoulders, and they even come to me asking permission to do this or that. When they leave the house they inform me where they are going and what time they will return. They respect my judgement about household affairs, the rules I have set, and they even come to me for advice on how to maintain their financial status. Both are desperate to succeed as performers of the Kabukiza and costumes and make-up are expensive and must be purchased by the performers themselves. Their pay is small, taxes are high in Tokyo, especially since the war, and they insist on keeping up the house, the grounds, and their old family servant Ti Si, who resents me to the marrow of his bones. Sometimes they borrow. "Erik, can I have twenty yen till next Tuesday, have to buy brocade kimono." Or, "Erik, tsuzumi cost fifty yen, must have for performance Friday."

They always insist on paying back.

We have gone many places together, always the three of us, and they delight in showing off Japan, Hanna always with coquetry, bantering, kidding,

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demure; Rasha always cynical, critical, boastful. They have exactly opposite personalities, yet, I cannot help but detect the similarity in their looks, their physical continuity. And I am puzzled sometimes at which one I am actually addressing—Hanna or Rasha! Their complexions are identical, utterly without blemish and satin smooth, and they are the same height, practically the same weight, in fact, they often exchange costumes with each other for the Kabukiza drama.

To love one is to love both!

This is a situation I cannot describe to myself, or can I understand—one male, the other female. The only conclusion I can draw from my commingling of their images is that they both dance in the Kabukiza theater, both play male and female parts, both a paradox in personality. Though different in their sexes, they seem to intermix at times and a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes which establish their surface male or female image, while underneath their sex is the very opposite of what it is outside. It is this mixture of them, one man the other woman, one being uppermost then the other, that often gives their conduct this unexpected turn, and which is exasperating to me. To another Japanese, this is not confusing. To an American, it is double

I watch them both with the scrutiny of a hawk on a chicken. And I am constantly amazed at their versatility. They both do everything they can in

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order to please me, and each does it differently separately in the totally individual way, yet the results are identical. They both woo me, one from a man's heart, the other from a woman's. Constant rivals, neither ever abandoning his or her post, they work like Titans to gain my favor, and to this night they both have gained considerable ground toward possession of my heart.

I had started my first night in Tokyo on what I considered a whimsical course: one night pursuing a carnal satisfaction. That whim had multiplied itself a hundred-fold, and had grown from whimsy into a whirling tornado, threatening my peace of mind, moving to rob me of my heart.

There was no going back now—ever. I had taken too many turns in the road. I had ventured too deeply into the maze, into the woven tapestry of Japanese life—Japanese beauty—ever to find my way out of the labryinth to the old way of life, to the old loneliness.

The mere mention of my name, and how endearingly both could say it: "Oh, Erik," this and, "Oh, Erik," that, piercing my very soul with the sound, until I would have promised—given—prodigies had they asked. That they both were mine was obvious in everything I did or said to them. I live for them. They are my family—I theirs.

Whether we were at the Yasukuni Shrine, solemn under the elaborate temple roofs with the carved tiles and deep eaves, like fantastic millefeuille, or gay in some cast-away bar off the Ginza,

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there was something deep and personal surrounding us, something both physical and spiritual which pulled we three together, which bound us with the golden threads of love, family and home.

Whether we were at the Meiji Shrine, writing our personal, secret prayers on strips of wood and placing them in the watery wheel of life, or under the gigantic paper lanterns on our knees whispering to Buddha, or fondling the sacred deer at Shinjuku gardens, or joyfully running over the little red wooden bridges through the rain, or pushing through the cheering crowds at the Hollyhock Festival, or listening quietly to the Joruri chanters at the Bunraku Puppet plays, or spending hours arranging a few sprigs of narcissus in a porcelain vase, dressing dolls, or simply eating kasuteira, we were as one, each depending upon the others presence, each ill-at-ease when one of the three was not present.

Even when I was writhing on the black silk bed with Hanna, indulging in every form of sex, at which she had become so adept, so delightful, sex was not complete for me unless Rasha lay in the next room, behind that paper wall, his physical presence a reunion within itself.

We are that close. We are so close that when Hanna and I go into her bedroom together, after we have bathed, there is a hungry glow in Rasha's eyes, for this he cannot share with us, and because he is left out of the rapture, a part of our existence Hanna shares but which he can never share, he

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somehow feels slighted. And when we emerge he is quick to do some small thing, however trivial, which will gain my immediate attention, and momentarily take my thoughts away from Hanna.

Now as I sit flipping through a handful of cards I shift my eyes from her to him, then back to her again, basking in my good fortune to have them as my own, to feel their love, like the golden warmth of the paper lanterns hanging from the ceilings, pour over me with gold. And everything is saffron peace.

Today is the thirteenth of July. It is O-Bon fete. And we three await the hour when we will take the lanterns sitting on the mats for this occasion and to go to the Yasukuni Shrine to light them before the Gods, then on to the cemetery to bring the spirit of the dead home. It is a solemn occasion here in Japan, but with overtones of gaiety, and it is a time for kindness and meditation.

Hanna glances at her wristwatch then begins to retrieve the sea of silk which all but surrounds her.

"Time for feast of lanterns," she announces, rising to her feet.

"Plenty of time to light lanterns," Rasha says impatiently, his dark head still buried in the book. "Can't wait for General Sherman to march through Georgia."

Hanna looks at him imploringly, almost critical-

ly.
"You show disrespect for Mama-San and Papa"You show disrespect for Mama-San and Papa-

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you care more for Sherman than for spirits of souls."

"Oh, okay," he murmurs, closing the book and getting to his feet. He slips into a mint green haori and picks up two of the lanterns.

Hanna comes to where I am sitting lazily and bends over me.

"Erik, you take lanterns and light at cemetery for your Mama-San and Papa-San—no?"

"Yes," I say, rising and adjusting my robe. I see no harm in following their ritual, which is precious to them, even if it means nothing in my own experience.

We go through the walled garden, and up the flight of stone steps to the temple. Hundreds of people are already out, and there is an ant file on the way back from the cemetery, the hundreds of tiny lanterns like blinking fire-flies in the darkness. In the harbor hundreds of small boats are lit with lanterns, and are being pushed out into the open sea, for those who have died during the war on the islands and have no burial grounds nor tombs on Japan proper.

Prayers are said at the temple, and we go on to the cemetery. At the graves of their parents Hanna and Rasha kneel and light a lantern for each.

"You light lanterns now for your Papa-San and Mama-San," Hanna whispers, taking me by the hand.

I obey, watching both their eager faces as the paper lanterns spring into glow.

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"Spirits of your people," Rasha informs me, pointing to the tiny lights." We go now to house, take lanterns, let parents visit for a while."

Their faces are lit with pride and happiness as I hold my lanterns up and look at them.

"A wonderful custom," I assure them, and for a sad moment I see the faces of my mother and father in the thin flames.

"Very ancient custom in Japan," Rasha says, boastfully, swelling his chest with pride. "Reunion of the living with the spirits of the dead—like having Mama-San and Papa-San alive with us once again."

"I wish they were back with you, Rasha," I say meaningfully, and I see his eyes shining back at me through the subdued light.

"No matter now, Erik Shanon," he says gravely, glancing at Hanna then to me. "We have someone to love us now."

Hanna nods approval, her eyes like black liquid, and a slight breeze, coming in to infiltrate the land from the Pacific, makes the lights tremble in the lanterns, as if the spirits of the dead are up in arms that someone has taken their place.

We turn silently and make our way through the cemetery the way we had come, going cross-current with the many people coming up, past the rows and rows of tombs that eerily penetrate the night sky. The clop-clop of wooden sandals against the stones sound like hundreds of crickets crying from the shadows, calling swiftly to mind our old farm house

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back home, and the hollow sounds of ships honking in the harbor add to the solemnity of the moment, the loneliness.

We go through the iron gateway of the garden and slowly, mutely, up the flagstone path to the pool. There we place the lanterns in a circle around the huge iron lantern with its miniature hell. Hanna brings out trays of food, tea, sake, and we enjoy a quiet feast, all three of us sitting on the freshly mowed grass under the bright stars.

"Mama-San and Papa-San very close tonight eh, Rasha?" Hanna asks, holding her hands over the lanterns, allowing their glow to seep into her.

"Like old times," Rasha answers, and he too touches the flame, and their faces are sad masks, in the ghostly flickering light.

I sit idly by, letting them have their ritual, their annual reunion with their mother and father. They are mine now and, though I, too, feel something of deep kindred with my own parents, a closeness, I think on my own happiness—my newly-found happiness amidst this greatly ancient world, this fantastic little island where I have at last found my anchorage.

Everything is so peaceful. The faint noises in the harbor. The sound of the ships, the quiet laughter along the steps as crowds go to and from the temple, the gaiety of the Ginza, the contentment of Hanna's and Rasha's voices as they talk to each other about trivial things concerning O-Bon which I do not understand, but which comes pleasantly to

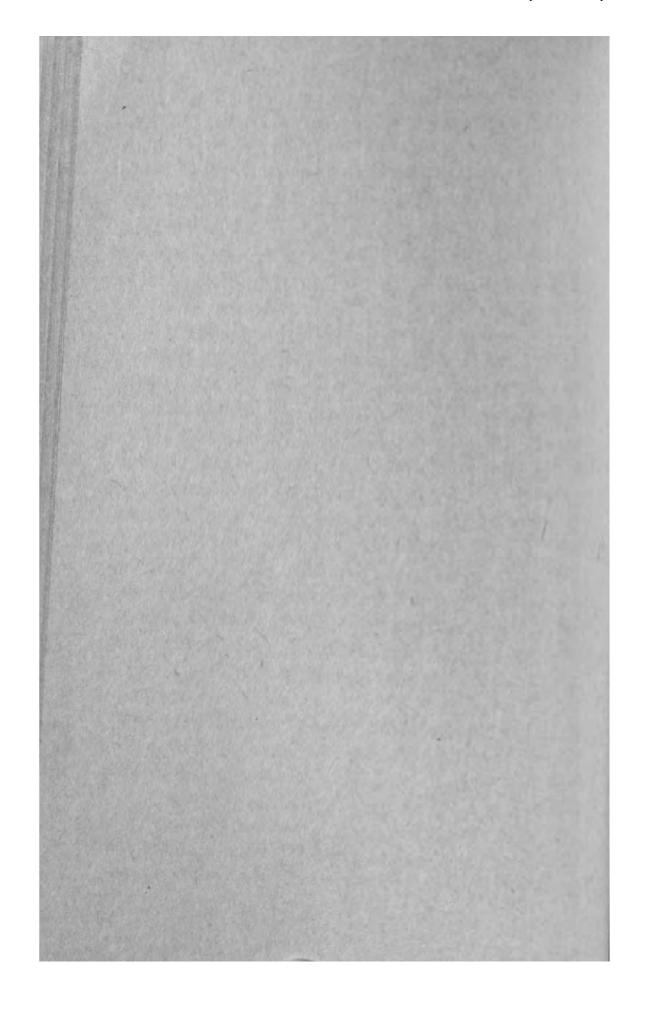
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my ears.

They are like children—so delighted are they over the fantastically lit lanterns—and I watch them through the eyes of my heart. I watch them and I love them, and I think how wondrous this night is. The thing farthest from my mind is that it is to be my last happy night with Hanna.

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CHAPTER SIX

The latter part of July is the Monsoon season in Japan. Now at dusk, I make my way hurriedly through the downpour of rain, through the iron gate, up the flagstone walk, and to the house on the hill, my arms loaded with gifts: candy and flowers and silk for Hanna, and records for Rasha. Today the Marines at the Embassy have received two months back pay, and I am especially festive, despite the rain, the slush, the wild streams backing up into enormous puddles at the gutters, the heavy limbs of the trees sagging under the weight of water.

The pool is ghostly dark, shimmering from the assault of thousands of tiny raindrops pounding its suface and, as I pass, stumbling on the slick stones, I notice the willowy trees bending and swaying like reapers' scythes. There is stormy wind violence in the drenched air, and it is reaping the emerald leaves like corn. Azalea blossoms, torn from their branches, litter the flagstones like tiny baby hands folded over pieces of gold, and carpet my path like an unrolled scroll of pink velvet.

Slipping off my muddy boots at the entrance, I notice, disappointed, that Hanna is not on the threshold to greet me as usual, and I sense imme-

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diately that something is drastically wrong. Rasha greets me instead, his face wan, his dark eyes filled with hurt he does not attempt to conceal. He takes the gifts and follows me into the kitchen where I empty two paper bags of groceries, wine, sake, and beer and place them in the ice-box.

"Where's Hanna?" I ask impatiently.

"Thanks very much for records, Erik," he answers sheepisly, ignoring my question.

"Where's Hanna?" I repeat.

"Erik-please!"

My head spins suddenly as I stand over him, drenched to the skin, a puddle of water beneath my stocking feet. I take him by the arm roughly, fearfully, my heart pounding like wild drums.

"Please, Erik, you hurting!"

I let go of him, but my desperation shows itself in my burning eyes, and he flinches as if from pain.

"What's wrong, Rasha?" I demand. "You've got to tell me, or, so help me God I'll strangle you here and now!"

His eyes burst into flame, and his nostrils flare like a wild animal's as he shrinks away from me. For once something has truly frightened him.

"Don't make me tell you, Erik," he pleads childlike, wringing his hands. "Hanna kill me!"

I glare at him for a moment. Then, with a great effort, I try to calm myself. I look at him kindly, searching frantically however for an answer to this unexpected riddle in his enormous, blazing eyes.

"Please, Rasha," I implore him, my heart caught

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up in the sound of my every word. "I've got to know—if anything has happened to Hanna—has someone done . . .?"

Rasha shakes his head.

"No one but you, Erik," he answers after a nightmare of silence. And he gulps, his dark head bowing upon his heaving chest.

I am stupefied.

"Me-What-what have I done?"

"Erik, you wet, while you take bath and get into dry clothes I tell you—maybe," he says, prolonging my agony and postponing his. He clutches at my tunic, obediently takes off my cap and puts it to one side.

"Oh, damn the dry clothes," I stammer, rudely pushing his hands away. "Hanna—what about Hanna?"

"Take warm bath first—soak temper, then think with clear head."

He coaxes me into the bathroom.

"Damn you Japs," I cry slightingly, not caring at the moment, my evening already spoiled. "Your patience is exasperating!"

A hurt look flashes across his face, and he bows his head as he helps me out of my uniform. He draws the little pool to the very brim with hot water and, taking off his own clothes, gets into the water with me and soaps me down.

Finished, he dries me off and helps me into one of his haoris. Then, without saying a word, he dries his own body, which I admire from the corner of

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my eye, thinking with sudden pudency how utterly male he is for his callow age, and goes to the louvered wall where he stands and gazes at the rain slashing against the frosted glass.

I am a bundle of nerves.

"Okay, Rasha, we've had our bath now, so what is it?"

With his back to me he blurts it out.

"Hanna—about to be Haha!"

"What?"

"Hanna with child-your child, Erik Shanon!"

I cave in with utter relief.

"My God! I thought it was something."

He turns a surprised face to me and he asks dumbfounded:

"You no feel shame, Erik Shanon?"

"Why should I feel shame?" I say mockingly, my palms spread wide.

He senses my casual acceptance of the significance behind the seeming tragedy and, with his head sagging he whimpers like a hurt dog.

"You no dirty American soldier to come to Japan—ruin sister, are you, Erik?"

I began to see through his bewilderment.

"You know I'm not," I answer seriously, going to him and laying my hand on his naked shoulder. "I'm glad she's going to have a baby, Rasha, our baby, hers and mine."

He shrugs.

"Go tell her that, Erik Shanon." He points to her bedroom.

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I rush into her room. She is seated on a black siken pillow facing the little dresser with the round mirror. She is dressed completely in white, her face made up with that chalk base which forms a bland mask, blotting out her features, her striking beauty. Her long black hair is unpinned and hangs like a mane down her rigid shoulders.

Startled, I look at her from the doorway, am shocked by what I see. Rasha, at my shoulder, speaks like an oracle of doom.

"Hanna go back to Japanese ways."

"Why—for God's sake, why?" I cry hoarsely, my sudden happiness over the child vanishing, a wild terror rushing to take its place.

"Hanna mourn for lost happiness."

Lost happiness! Why this is only the beginning of our happiness, I think desperately and, with a rustle of my silk haori I sink beside her.

"Oh, Hanna, is it true? Are you really going to have a baby? Our baby?"

She does not turn her head, nor look at me, nor indicate in any way that she senses my physical presence; always before she would melt into my arms, but she whispers remorsefully:

"It's true, Erik Shanon. Hanna heavy with

I take hold of her arm affectionately at this, but she shrugs me away. Still she does not turn her face in my direction, but persists in staring into the mirror, her eyes like marbles.

"I'm glad, Hanna," I whisper soothingly, think-

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ing mercifully that tonight was going to bring peace and happiness after all. Once she heard this I thought, heard that I was glad, then she too would be glad. And I say again: "I'm glad you're going to have a baby, Hanna, our baby!"

She turns then surprisingly and stares at me, a cold stare that goes to the back of my mind.

"Are you, Erik Shanon? Are you glad you dirty American soldier who come to Japan, who ruin fine Japanese girl, who get her pregnant, who ruin her life—are you glad?"

I am shocked beyond belief. Though her voice penetrates to the farthest recesses of my soul, I cannot comprehend the motive behind her reproachful words.

"But I—but I never wanted to ruin you, Hanna," I stutter aimlessly, groping in my frantic mind for something plausable to say. "I only wanted to love you—to love you now, as always. The baby will bring us greater happiness. You'll love it—just you wait and see."

Suddenly she wheels on me. Her eyes glint like a snakes.

"Look at me!" she screams, spreading her arms wide. "Look at me, Erik Shanon. My figure ruined! My career ruined! Me no more can dance the Kabuki! Other dancers win over Hanna! Take my place. Me get old and ugly taking care of unwanted baby—ugly American baby! Me lose face in Japan. Japanese girl disgraced who have American child by dirty American soldier. Nobody want baby in

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Japan. Child grow up not wanted, no can go to school with Japanese children, no can find job—everybody see child part American—hate! hate! hate!"

Frantically, I take her into my arms and pull her close to me. I had not known, nor did I have a way of knowing, that such stupid rules persisted in Japan, and I say as much to her. Over her shoulder I see Rasha standing mutely in the doorway, and his face is wretched with pain, in the death throes of battle with old traditions and his obvious affection for me. Hanna wrenches herself free and rises savagely to her feet.

"You should know, stupid American soldier!" she half screams, and she goes into a rage. "You know how to nezi! You no too stupid for that—eh?"

Rasha, fumbling irritably, intervenes.

"It's your fault, Hanna," he says, and his voice is harsh, cold, almost female in essence. "I warn you against American soldier, against all American soldiers. But no listen. Erik not bad soldier. Erik good Marine—try do best for Hanna."

"Ah!" she shrieks, flinging her arms dramatically. "Who take up for dirty American soldier nower?" Her eyes throw darts at Rasha, almost visible to the sight. "Dirty American soldier buy pretty gifts, melt Rasha's heart, turn Rasha against old tradition."

Rasha stands his ground. Surprised I listen, but numbed now by the fury into which Hanna's emo-

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tions have plunged.

"If you no better to wallow like pig, then Erik no better to wallow with you. Man only do to woman what woman is willing to do!"

Her body goes rigid. She lifts herself up on tiptoe, strains as though she is wrapped in bonds and is trying desperately to free herself. A surge of pity goes out to her. I try again to take her in my arms.

"Oh, Hanna," I plead frantically, promising anything that will soothe the wild rage to which she has completely abandoned herself. "We'll get married. We'll have the child legally. It'll be your child and my child, and to hell with the world and what the world says about it."

"No!—no have child!" She pounds her tiny fists against my chest. "No ruin figure! Do something! Have doctor do something!"

"We'll go to the United States—all of us."

"No go to dirty United States. Stay in Japan!" I grab her hands. She breaks away, runs across the room, on into the living room savagely, the fate to which she has doomed herself drawing on her every emotion, making her existence a living hell. She pauses instinctively at the gallery, looks dimly out onto the rain washed night. For a tense moment she retains her old calm. Rasha and I look at one another. We follow instantly on her heels.

"I go to doctor, have something done," she whispers sadly. "No have half-American, half-Japanese child—then kill self!"

"That's crazy talk, Hanna," I say, pleadingly.

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"Nobody love me nowhow," she half sobs, pulling her white morning robe about her to ward off the chill of the rain.

"I love you—love you very much, so much I will do anything before I see you harm our child—or yourself."

"Pretty talk, Erik Shanon. You no suffer with child like Hanna." She turns hatefully and glares at me. "You no carry baby in belly for nine months, Erik Shanon. You free now—free now to get other nice Japanese girls pregnant. Knock up all Japanese girls on Ginza, see if I care." She turns toward the rain and the fast approaching night. "I kill ugly baby—then kill self—no can face Japanese disgrace."

"Hanna no kill baby or self," Rasha speaks up, going to her and laying a firm hand on her shoulder. "Keep old tradition. You stay in house, keep healthy, have child. Rasha make living, bring food, be doctor for you. When baby come you face disgrace—look Japan in eye, say you love baby cause you love Erik."

There is silence for a moment. Only the sounds of the rain can be heard, the torrents of water gushing over the low eaves, the dark limbs of trees creaking and groaning as it falls on them out of the night.

"If you were girl, Rasha," she says finally, her back to the both of us, "if you were girl would you have ugly child, would you ruin pretty body, dance no more in Kabukiza theater, lose face—would you

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do that, Tara Rasha?"

He answers readily.

"If I was girl, Hanna, I have baby through love of Erik. I raise in old tradition—like Mama-San and Papa-San wish, be proud to carry Erik's child in body."

"So you like to carry Erik's baby," she screams, turning like a mad woman and springing on us with her piercing eyes. "You no better than me, Rasha, like pig!" and she points toward the garden pool. "We both unworthy pigs. We both lose face with Mama-San and Papa-San, with old tradition. With our love for dirty American soldier we let ancient fire in lantern go out!" At that she picks up an iron ladle, scoops up a handful of hot coals from the warm hibachi and runs out into the rain. Rasha and I follow. She cries—deep guttural sounds that rip up from the bottom of her tortured soul as she plows through the slush, her body bent almost double with inner-pain, her white, chalk face melting with the torrent of rain.

Rasha and I attempt to assist her, clinging to her desperately, feeling her plight, the horror of her undoing, and we three sink near the dark iron lantern helplessly, our bodies wet through and through.

I try to help her re-kindle the lantern but she flings my hand away.

"No need help from dirty soldier to light ancient lantern," she screams hysterically, her twisted face a hideous nightmare beneath the streams of white

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paste, her long dark hair like shreds of drenched moss about her trembling shoulders.

Rasha lifts the ladle and, opening the grate, pours in the coals.

"Please, Hanna, Rasha light," he half-sobs, their bodies warmly close.

She turns, gazes at him, as if recognizing him for the first time, and, with weariness and heartache assailing her she begins to sob. She sobs, moans, hisses the lantern, then Rasha's dripping face, and her whole body, seen readily through the thin silken robe, trembles like a deer in a storm.

I cannot stand to see her like this. I love her, love her desperately, and I must touch, must kiss, must fondle those I love. Bending over her, I place my hands on each side of her waist, kiss her on the back of the neck.

"I love you, Hanna," I cry forlornly, wretchedly.
"Let me love you. Let me be good to you. I am
sorry—sorry about the baby!"

"No!" she flings back, awakening from her torpor, facing the harsh reality of her curse once more. "Don't ever touch me again, dirty American! Don't ever touch me again!"

I ease my lips, my trembling hands away, and I listen savagely, stricken at my heart which seems to be leaping against the walls of my body. I look up, to pray as I have never prayed in my whole life, and I see Ti Si standing above me, a huge Samurai sord in his hands ready to strike.

"Just say the word, Zyotyuu Hanna," he says

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solemnly, "and Ti Si slice white soldier into dog meat!"

Rasha, lifting his rain washed head, sees. He raises both hands to halt the sword.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Under the assault of Ti Si's threats and Hanna's hostility, I move my things from the house on the hill and back to the Marine Wing of the Embassy. My welcome, if it can be called a welcome, is a wall of aloofness. Like the early frontiersman was pegged as a squaw man by reason of taking up with an Indian, so was I pegged a gook man for living with a Japanese girl. Though some of the other Marines had lived with Japanese girls, and were still living with them, their action was different in that they went to bed with these girls only for the pleasure it brought them and did not take their relationships seriously. And I was in love with Hanna, body and soul, and this was not accepted socially by the other Marines, nor was it condoned. You could have sex with a Japanese girl, with two or three at a time, and the world couldn't care less, but if you loved one—then you were being different—and to be different is to be damned.

Mercifully, I realized my predicament and knew how to cope with it. I pretended my affair was only of casual interest, and went about my Marine duties with a recklessness I was far from feeling. In fact, I went out of my way to appear debonair on the surface, joked a great deal, kidded, bragged

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about other Japanese girls, and even went so far as calling some of the other Marines "gook men."

Yet there were times when I could hardly restrain myself from revealing my true feelings, and I longed for Hanna more than I had ever longed for anyone in my whole life. And when one of the marines on duty would yell at me from the yard, "Hey, Erik, your slant eyed brother-in-law is here to see you," I would forget my pretense at casualness and run down to the front gate where Rasha stood waiting. He was not allowed inside the Embassy, so we would usually stand at the entrance of the yard as he brought the latest news about Hanna. I would always have a million questions and Rasha answered them as accurately and as honestly as he knew how, and during my nightmare of misery, of waiting, of hoping that she would eventually see me, I thanked God for Rasha.

I had been wrong about this kid. I learned that if he hated, he hated with a passion but that he loved with an equal passion. Once he knew you, trusted you, and admired you, he could be the most loyal of friends. And Rasha is loyal to me. He is bound to me by something I cannot understand and I doubt if he can understand it either, but we are drawn now during Hanna's absence like moths to a candle.

He has learned my hours on and off guard duty and he comes to the Embassy every day when my tour is over and waits for me outside the iron gates. Rain or shine, and it rains abundantly in Japan, he is there to greet me, always a little sad, always a

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little wan, a little blue under the eyes, his mouth drawn tightly over his teeth, but nevertheless there.

Though I have not given up the hope that Hanna will eventually allow me to visit her, and I think Rasha still harbors such a hope as well. I try and keep my little family going. I give him money for groceries, for needed clothes in the Kabukiza, for household articles, and for little gifts for him to buy Hanna I think she will love. I make him tell her they are from him, otherwise she will not accept them, knowing they are from me.

That she is lonely for me, that she pines for my physical presence is obvious, for the very sound of Rasha's voice when he tells me about her, the woebegone look in his eyes, betrays them both.

He is so much like her he feels her every emotion. Her love for me shines in his dark liquid eyes. Her desire for me shows itself in his every move, his every gesture. She talks to me through him, though neither know this, and when he is near, sitting with him at the San Sui Ro restaurant, or close at the Noh Dramas, or during some weekend when we stay at the Dai-Ichi hotel (leased by the Allied Forces) to get away from it all and see the sights, his closeness brings her very near to me, and I feel that if it weren't for Rasha to help keep me going, I would crack up.

I learn from him that she intends to carry the child on to its proper length of time, and to bear it, due mostly to his constant persuasion to stick to the old traditions which look upon a coming child

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as a joyful, holy occurrence. But after that—no, he does not know her intentions—her plans, if she has any plans.

"Sometimes I think she hates me," I remark one warm August evening as Rasha and I sit near a glass panel in the Inagiku restaurant awaiting for the Okunchi Festival, the dragon dance, when hundreds of young men beneath a paper dragon will snake their way through the streets. It is the festival of the Suwa Shrine, and there will be much gaiety and noise, but I am far from feeling the least bit festive.

"Hanna don't hate you, Erik," he answers dimly, looking up from his thimble of sake. "At first, I think so—yes." He pauses, looks sadly away. "But not anymore—been month now."

"Then why won't she let me see her?"

He swallows hard. He is loyal to his last drop of blood, both to her and to me, and he is unhappy because we are unhappy. He wants us together, like old times.

"Erik—I wish more than anything in whole world you and Hanna back together, sleeping at house, one big happy family, but she no let you come back, not now—not now, Erik. Maybe someday."

"But I need her now, Rasha," I say insistently. "And she needs me—now more than any other time."

"I know, Erik," he replies, understanding, as a grown man. "But you not Japanese, Erik. You no

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savvy. You never now girl like my sister Hanna—her different!"

I lay a hand on his naked arm.

"What is it that I don't know?"

His eyes are naked with pain.

"Hanna forever thinks about her beauty, like other girls at Kabukiza—her whole life, Erik. Hanna wants to be great actress, maybe in movies, famous like Betty Grable, like serious actress—Joan Crawford maybe. But her ugly now, Erik. Figure like toy balloon. She lose faith in self. She no bathe. She no comb and fix hair. She no put on make-up. She no wear beautiful silk kimonos. Wear only mourning dress. She like dead woman. Lost interest in life."

I look away, blink back tears. My beautiful Hanna. God! how I wish I could see her.

Lanterns are being lit. The street lights go on, and down the crowded street comes the paper drag-on, huge of head, flaming of eyes, meandering from side to side like a dragon tipsy on sake. Children follow after squealing and laughing, and the gaiety is cracking my heart!

"I don't care how ugly she is," I blurt out, dragging my eyes back to Rasha who is staring oddly at me. "It's her heart and her mind I want—her love. I need her love, Rasha, need to see her, look at her, put my arms around her—don't you understand?"

He lifts his chin, and his child's face is blazing with interest.

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"I understand, Erik. If I Hanna's sister, I give myself to you, like girls do long ago in old traditions. You need woman, Erik. All warriors need woman."

I glance away in disgust.

"I don't want just any woman, Rasha," I say sorrowfully, welled up in my own self-pity, and I finger the cigarettes on the ash tray. "I want Hanna. I will never be happy again if I have to live without her."

He lowers his eyes beneath dark dusky lashes. He pretends to study the symbolic artistry of the lacquered-topped table.

"Be patient, Erik," he murmurs.

I lift an eyebrow skeptically.

"I am being patient, Rasha my boy, and nothing is happening. I am going out of my mind—this waiting ..."

"Erik, maybe Hanna don't want you to see her ugly. Maybe when baby come she perk up, put paint on face, fix hair, look beautiful, very utukusii—just for you. Maybe her see you then, like old times—good hope—eh?"

Listening to this deprived kid sounding my deepest depth with hope, I take account of myself, my dignity, withdraw my heart which lies bleeding on my sleeve, and smile at him with a faint, apologetic smile.

"Maybe she will," I add comfortingly, and I rise to my feet. No point in spoiling the world for the kid. "Come, Rasha, lets see the festival."

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* * *

It is Autumn now, late Autumn. The cherry blossoms have gone, only pink paper ones to take their place, and the emerald jewel of Japan has tumed into a lovely garnet. Moss of deepest russet covers the old stones in the ancient gardens, carpets the roofs of the scarlet temples, and lays a soft emine path where patterns no longer clatter, like on the flagstones of summer, as crowds solemnly go to and fro from home, work, and pleasure. And in this densely-crowded, over-active city of approaching winter, I take my place among them, lost, wandering, sometimes with Rasha quietly following after me, many times alone, feeling out the scrambled world into which I have plunged my heart, my mind. Restlessness and resignation are everywhere around me. The bad breaks are bringing it on me in torrents of emotion.

How difficult it is, now, to respond to these forces which are unknown to me, this distant land, these eternal strangers, in whose faces I see only one expression, bewildered longing.

Myself!

For the first time in my life I am alone, and that loneliness is making me afraid. Alone on this miniature island, with these aloof people who strive eternally never to be alone, so possessive is their emotional pull toward others, to seek anyone's company rather than to be alone, I feel in exile. I have surrendered to their ways, have penetrated into

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their lives, their customs only far enough to see the difference, to comprehend my oneness, and I have the deep urge now to identify myself with these people in a more meaningful way, to try and force them to understand me so that I in turn can understand them.

Rasha has become my ruse, the key to open up my mind and my heart and let out my loneliness. He is my constant companion. Strangely, now that I have lost Hanna (if not her then surely her love) I seek no other companions. He is so much a part of her that having him with me is, to an extent, having a part of her with me too.

We have seen many festivals, have merged our simple, uninterested lives into the triumphs and defeats of winter. He, on my heels like a devout collie, a servant, caters to my every whim, or, more like a slave, he clings to me continually, perhaps because he has cut himself away from whatever bonds held him, some rebellious hatred for all the things he could not possess before, and me, choking my loneliness and my unhappiness with hours drugged on glitter, and speed, and time, and bits of confettied nonsense.

I can name them all: The Great Bonfire Festival, the Full-Moon Viewing, the Sumo tournaments at Kokugikan, Equinox Day (a national holiday in Japan), the Bull Festival where the spectators chase demons, Culture Day, the Day of Shichi-Go-San (children's day at the shrines) Festival of Kasuga, and the Grand Last Day of Omisoka (Ja-

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pan's christmas.) And I have emerged from them all as hollow of heart as when I entered.

Hanna still will not see me, and my life, though lonely it is, has taken on another pattern.

Rasha is still with me, doing his part, or trying to do his part to fill the emptiness. I love him deeply for his affection, his sincerity, his attitude of one who had rebelled against all the Americans yet has sacrificed that noble rebellion for a cause he saw more just.

Whenever we are together, maybe not talking, just sitting looking at the scenery, watching the people go by at the Shrines, or on warm days fondling the sacred deer at Shinjuku gardens, I look at him sadly, consider that he is all I now have really left in the world, and I try to understand him.

And all I understand is this.

Alone now, himself, in a house, a family, a way of life totally divided, he is not sure of what he believes. His mind is a battleground of conflicting philosophies. Even the religion of his forebears has been discredited in his young eyes since the war, now mere formalities to be endured at weddings and funerals, and is anachronistic and empty. To him now, especially since my arrival in his life, a new hope from a new more distant world, the temple or shrine is only a playground, a refuge from the rain, a place to meet a girl. It is no longer a netreat for spiritual solace. Japanese religion is too closely identified with authoritarianism and empire.

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When the old system was swept away by the war, faith went with it.

So, like me, he stands alone now, and in a world which bore him and bred him, then exiled him to the confusing torments of his time. So—he has turned to me for a stepping hold, a day by day flagstone of hope which may take him out of his old anarchistic world and to one in which he may—someday—believe. He no longer fights back. Now, he has lost his fight. Like a glint of light lowered into a dark well, I am lighting the way to the surface of his mind. He is deeply grateful, though he may never put it into words. Tyranny and the old, heaped-up traditions may still his tongue. But then, I reflect, he may someday find the courage to speak.

He is all I have left in the world.

Then I look across his profile to the hills laden with winter and harvest, toward Mt. Fuji, and to the harbor of Tokyo, and in retrospect see in a vision my first day here, alighting from one of those death gray ships, and I ask myself gravely, painfully, accepting at last my loss of Hanna's love, for my frantic days are gone now:

"How is it all going to end?"

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CHAPTER EIGHT

"That slant-eyed little gook is at the gate—wants to see you!" one of the Marines yells, as he comes off guard duty. He slaps me on the behind with his dress belt as he passes on the way to the shower stalls. "Who you shacking up with, Koony, that kid or his sister?"

I grab his belt, wrap it tightly around his arm, and fling him against the wall. These last few months have worn my nerves to a frazzle, with Rasha's frequent visits to the Embassy and my never knowing what his next message will bring, and I emphasize this by shoving my fist into the Marine's gut.

"Don't you worry about it," I say to him gruffly, making my final thrust a little harder than the others. I had never liked him anyway.

"Okay! Okay!" he stammers, his face a cocky mask, his hands going up as if I have thrust a pistol at him. "What's got into you? Can't you take a little joking anymore?"

Without benefit of an answer, I slip into my dress blues hurriedly and half run through the Embassy. Wonder what it is this time? I ask my self, thinking briefly over the past month—the month of December to be exact—at the numerous

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causes for alarm: the last few days of Hanna's pregnancy, her transfer to the hospital, the birth of the baby, and all taking place without my being privileged to see her, the agony of waiting in between Rasha's visits, and the puzzled apathy hanging over my endless worry and impatience at wondering if I would ever be able to see her at all. The child, a boy, a blue eyed, but slant-eyed Erik Shanon in miniature, was already two weeks old, and still Hanna had refused my admittance to the house on the hill to see my son. I had sent money through Rasha to pay the hospital bill, to buy needed things for the baby, and gifts for her. These gestures had made no impression on her. I had sent notes, long, imploring notes declaring my love, my wish to be with her, and my loneliness without her. There had been no answers. All I had learned was what Rasha had been willing to tell me, which wasn't too much. By nature he was not free with words, except on boasting moments, like all teenage boys, but I did not hold this against him. He answered whenever I asked, the most important questions at least, and these were the ones essential for me to keep my sanity.

As I hurry down the steps affronting the Embassy I notice crowds of people going in swarms alond D avenue, past the Asahi Art company and toward Ioth street, and I remember that it is January the first, day of the O-Shogatsu festival, the greatest holiday in Japan. This does little, if anything, to cheer me, to take me out of my depression

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and about all the spirit I can summon is to think: "at least its a warm, sunshiny day."

I find Rasha in the concrete guard house which sits flanking the iron gate, talking to a Marine. When he sees me his face suddenly lights up like a paper lantern.

"Hanna see you today," he announces, showing a flash of white teeth, and he is as overjoyed as I.

"Don't kid me, Rasha!" I stammer, trembling oddly now that the time has actually come. "My nerves can't take it."

"No kid, Erik," he explains, coming on strong.

"You see her and baby, but not at house." He grabs me by the arm impatient to lead the way.

"Where then?" I ask dumbly, as if the geographical location means a damn to me. I am so desperate to see her that I would willingly meet her in hell.

"Meet at temple," Rasha answers, wedging his way through the moving crowd, forming a free aisle for me to follow him. As we hurry along the way we stoop at intervals to go under the shime-nawa, (taboo-rope) which is stretched across the street. I notice at the entrance of each doorway decorations of pine trees—denoting long life—and young boys, like the time oh, so long ago, are busy flying colorful kites. Girls, with nagoita (flowered rackets) are skipping on their way to shuttlecock courts, and parents with their young, all done up in elaborate dress, bounce along on wooden pattens, the clatter contributing a note of gaiety and festival abandon.

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Excitement and a sense of hurry-hurry grip my every sense, and for the first time I regard Rasha's movements as slow. With my hand on his shoulder so that we will not become separated and lost in the flood of human flesh, we skip up the stone steps leading to the temple.

He takes me around the temple building and to the opposite side where there is an outer garden. We go down a straight bridge, flanked by enormous stone lanterns, and out into a sunlit lawn dappled with thinly spaced pine and moss carpeted stones.

Then I see her!

The huge orange parasol has been thrust in the soft turf for support, its gigantic circle of tissue paper forming a canopy of shade and, as on that first time I saw her, she is bathed in a luminous orange glow. She is standing, dressed in shimmering tangerine, and our baby is in her arms. Momentarily she is distracted, as two sacred deer brave her presence and move in under the parasol, and she does not see Rasha and me approach.

When she does see she, like I, holds her gaze, and her dark eyes are deep wells of suffering. The look cuts to the core of me and, though wanting to scold her for refusing to see me all these fearful months, I can tell by her sad eyes, her too-thin figure, her ashen complexion, that she has endured enough.

I want to run to her, to fold her in my arms, to kiss away all the suffering I have caused, but life during these past months has embittered my heart, has coarsened me, has hardened something within

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my conscience, has shelled over my pliable reserves, and I go to her very slowly, drinking in with tortured eyes, the picture I see of her framed against the ice blue of Mt. Fuji.

At my approach she smiles a wry, careful smile which sets me to trembling from my head to my toes, and starts my heart beating a cadence like the throb of a full pulse. I read in her placid face turned up to mine the agony of the months without each other.

"Hello, Erik," she says shyly, as if greeting me for the first time, like a timid school girl with her first beau, but the tremor of her weak voice contains love for me, and I take her by the hand.

With Rasha as anxious as I to get a close look, she shows me the baby, its tiny round face, too, lit by the bright orange of the paper parasol. His eyes are miniature stars mounted in pale blue velvet skies as he looks up at me from beneath the white coverlet and, with a fist in his mouth no larger than a rosebud, he laughs.

"He recognizes me," I say boastfully, letting him gip one of my fingers in his tiny fist, and I cluck at him intimately, forgetting myself. Hanna and Rasha laugh, a hearty laugh which is balm to my wrecked heart, and which unravels my tangled mind. I think: we are together again.

When all is quiet, Hanna looks up at me.

"You been alright, Erik?" Her voice is deeply serious, primed with concern for my well being, and Ichoke back tears.

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I drown the agony of the moment with sarcasm.

"Oh—of course, Hanna. A different Japanese girl every night, dinners at the tea houses, wine, women, and song."

"Good-I want you to be happy."

It is such a weak voice that says this, a voice so infinites mal it is hardly heard, but it contains such power of love in it for me, it could shatter a world.

I am suddenly strung with the impatience, the

age old curiosity of why-why-why?

"Why wouldn't you let me see you, Hanna? Why? It was all so miserable, and I needed you so. You know I love you. You knew I wanted to be with you when you were carrying our child."

She stares absently in the distance.

"I did not want you to be unhappy, Erik. I did not want to take your freedom away from you freedom very precious to Marine. I did not want to become—burden to you."

"A burden!" I glare down at her, the sweat popping out on my hands and making the palms clammy.

"Oh, Erik! Don't look at me like that! I know from the first. Every Japanese girl know what's in soldiers heart. You only want to meet me because you wanted to go to bed with me—not for love, not for marriage. American soldier not marry Japanese girls, only marry American girl."

I look at her outraged, thinking how terribly mistaken she is.

"You're wrong, Hanna. I do love you. I want to

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marry you, honest." My eyes search out hers, find them, hold them. "I'll marry you any time you say —I'll ..."

"Please, Erik," she cries, interrupting, holding up her hand as if to ward off my words. "Don't make things worse. Don't say things—don't make promises you regret after."

My brain spins. The blood rushes to my head

and explodes.

"Regret marrying you! For God's sake, Hanna, I love you, I want to live the rest of my life with you. I want to marry you."

She is firm.

"Too late to marry, Erik," she says, and her voice is flat, like a lament. "You should have thought of marriage long ago, but now too late—too late!"

"What do you mean it's too late? Its never too late—never when two people are in love—like you and I."

She lifts her dark eyes slowly and fastens them on mine. They are naked with love for me but fighting that love is a cold logic I can never myself fight nor understand.

"I no can marry you, Erik. No can ruin your life, like I ruin mine. Lose face with Japanese people—lose faith with old traditions I once loved, lose spiritual solace at temple—nothing left."

I want to shout. I want to fling my arms in the air, to jump up and down, anything to penetrate her rigid mind and lighten her own heart with the

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heat of mine. I glance momentarily at Rasha idly feeding one of the sacred deer, peer at the baby absently, scan the horizon of faces gliding through the sun dappled garden, trying all the while to conjure up something to say which will make her understand what I mean. There are no words. Yet, I know that my arms around her, my lips on her lips, could make her understand more than all my stumbling, inadequate words. I sigh heavily, open my mouth, the saliva sticking to my feverish lips.

"Hanna," I began slowly, building my campaign of words. "I know your life is different from mineyour customs, your religion, know that, because the Americans won the war you are naturally bitter; you and Rasha for that matter, and I do not blame you. But we are two people, a man and a woman, you are Japanese and I am an American, but we are no different as far as the heart is concerned. We both are capable of loving the same way, of having sex the same way, of becoming parents the same way-and that is the thing that counts. All this other, this tradition, this losing face, this "too late" business is nothing but trash. We are both alone in the world. We both have lost our parents. We both are in love. We have a child. What is going to keep us from getting married, raising this fine boy the way he should be raised, with a name, and living in that house on the hill, and having Rasha with us, and Ti Si with us, and staying right here in Japan till we both die and are buried in that cemetery yonder beside your mother and father? Now what's

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going to keep us from doing all these wonderful things together, Hanna-just tell me?"

"It's too late, Erik, too late!"

"Now wait-just wait a minute," I insist, but keeping my patience, realizing that I must win her now, this moment, or never, and I am gambling everything I own, every guile I can conjure up, every whiff of wit, to employ to gain her favor. "Now think, before you start with this-'it's too late'-think about the truth, nothing but the absolute truth—the truth that is in your heart, not any of this other-this tradition, this scandal, this what is good and what is not good—just the truth in your own heart."

She fumbles for proper words, but her eyes are

"If I marry you, Erik, then someday you not want me. You hate me for holding you to marriage. Best we love short while like we did, then say

sayonara."

I swallow hard. I am losing the greatest and most important battle of my life. A citadel stormed is a thing spoiled in the taking. So I have spoiled the essence of my love by making it into something cheap.

I say in last retort.

"Then you want to say sayonara-in other words you're through?"

Huge silvery tears flood her eyes.

"Oh, Erik! How cruel you can be and meaning nothing by it. I no want to say sayonara. I only see

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life ahead, and I want to spare you much unhappiness. Someday you want to go to America, not want to stay here all time with Rasha and baby and me, I must think of heart, broke already! Not want broke second time!"

I look down at her sadly, imploringly, my heart in my eyes.

"You'll break mine if this is good-bye."

"Better to break heart little bit now than to shatter later."

"Don't you love me, Hanna?"

"You meet other nice girls, Erik, sweet Japanese girls maybe who be good to you, make you happy someday."

"Do you love me, Hanna?"

"Man not need love. Man is man whether he love or not."

"Then you don't love me?" I play my triumph card.

She begins to cry softly.

"Oh, Erik! Wish you never come to Tokyo! Wish bomb had killed Rasha and me when Mama-San and Papa-San die. Heart be safe now in grave—not hurt like hurting now!"

"Then you do love me?"

"Love no good, when poison heart, make life miserable."

I feel a sharp pain in my heart. I breathe heavily. I look at my watch. I will have to go on duty in half an hour. My mind races like a treadmill.

"Hanna," I begin again, the world crashing

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about my ears. "I've got to go in a little while. I am coming to your house tonight after guard duty. I am bringing my things. Tomorrow we are going to get married."

"No, Erik!"

"Now listen." I shake her arm impatiently, driving for time. "While I am gone I want you to think about it. I want you to get everything ready for tomorrow, understand?"

She shakes her head.

"I am not going to take no for an answer. I want to marry you, and I am going to have you for my wife, whether you like it or not. I love you, Hanna, and I am not going to lose you simply because of tradition or scandal or any of that nonsense. What is past is past. What is done is done. I have done you wrong. I realize that now, but I will make all that up to you if you will give me the chance. We will have all the rest of the years of our life to love each other, to love our baby."

I kiss her lightly on the forehead and turn to go. She remains standing under the orange parasol, flanked by the two sacred deer and Rasha, his arm around her.

I make my way through the dappled sunlight and shade, up the three stone steps to the bridge flanked by the stone lanterns, but then I turn and gaze back in her direction. They stand watching me. In this moment I have never seen her so beautiful. I do not know (and how am I to know) that I am to lose her forever.

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Far in the night I hear someone calling for me from the gate of the Embassy. I dress and hurry down, my heart in my throat. It is Rasha. He recognizes me in the darkness and comes running toward me. He shakes with sobs. With abandon he grabs hold of me, pulls me through the gate. He is so stricken with grief his mind is unhinged, and he is impatient for the misery in his soul to be heard.

"My God, Rasha!" I cry, "what is it?" but never thinking the worst.

"Its Hanna, Erik! She try and kill self—commit hara-kiri!"

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CHAPTER NINE

It is said that when you have not seen your home in a long time that when you return it seems smaller. This was not so. As I run up the flagstone walkway and gaze crazily at the house on the hill, which I have not entered in many months—the only place I can call home—it seems to sprawl for acres in the distance and, desperate for time, I feel that I will never reach it.

Entering the foyer, with Rasha's hot breath on my neck, I glance once at the huge living room marked off by shiny fish-scale screens, see the little hara-kiri altar set up in the far corner and I catch my breath, as if I have been stabbed in the side.

How often during the past had I seen that little black alabaster table on which stood a miniature of Buddha in orange terra-cotta, and the long razor-sharp sword resting in front of it, and had casually considered it no more than a traditional decorative motif. Now, in my heartbreak, it seems more awe-some than a hangman's noose.

It marks the scene of Hanna's tragic sacrifice to her god, and blindingly I catch a vision of her kneeling before it, the sword pressed against her side, her frail body lunging forward. The vision unhinges my mind.

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"I heard her cry," Rasha is saying, as I stand numbly in the middle of the room and stare crazily about me, "and running into the room me see her slumped over there, all smeared with blood." He points toward the altar.

"But why?" I say, and for the hundredth time in my mind on the way from the Embassy. Everything had seemed so hopeful this evening at the temple, so victorious.

"I don't know," he replies, shaking his head dumbly. "When I pick her up her say: Go get Erik,

please!"

I grab at my heart. I want to cry but tears will not come. This is a calamity too deep for tears.

At the sound of our voices old Ti Si enters from the bedroom and stands mutely on the threshold. His eyes are cold and hard on me, and at their sight I become irresolute. An odd fear grips me. I go to him.

"How is she?" I ask readily, ignoring his silent hate.

"She is dying!" he answers flatly. "White dog, she wishes to see you."

Silently I go in, leaving a sniffing Rasha and a solemn dignitary behind, and for a terrible instant I stand in tihs room which had once shielded so much of my happiness and look about me. It is hospital clean, as prim and neat as a school girl's.

Hanna is lying on her black silken sindai, her tiny, demure body clothed from head to toe in immaculate, mourning white. The cedar colored

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canopy has been lowered, and I see her as if through a dark mist. She is like a doll out of some childhood dream, a figure out of some old half-forgotten story book. I writhe at the sight of her there behind that translucent wall, so white, so still, her face made up with rice powder, her head adorned in one of her fantastic wigs. Incense burns in the laps of tiny Buddhas on each side of the bed, and there is that unmistakable essence of talcum powder which I had come to associate and distinguish the Japs overseas in the Islands. It is a sweet scent, delicate as moth dust, but it will linger in my nostrils till the last day I live.

Like a man who has but this one minute to speak his love, to say what he must say before that love leaves him forever, I rush across the room and lifting the veil, kneel beside her.

"It is me, Erik," I whisper, seeing her face so still, so quiet and thinking her already dead.

Oh, God! if she is dead I will kill myşelf too!

But she moves weakly at the sound of my voice or the sound of my name and what it implies, and fixes her feeble eyes on mine.

"Oh, Erik-forgive me?" she mutters, her voice

thick, muffled.

"Why—Hanna—why?" I cry out in my heartbreak, asking a question that I will keep asking myself every day for the rest of my life.

She is silent for a moment, then she answers

faintfully.

"No hurt you, Erik-try and kill self so you be

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free—go to—to someone else who—can make you happy."

I fill the room with my longing, my wrath.

"I want only you, Hanna, you know that." I take her hand. "There is no woman anywhere in the world who can make me happy as you can. Where will I go, what will I do without your love?"

She looks at me and her eyes are filled with tears. "Hanna love you, Erik."

At that all the pent up emotion within me bursts forth like a broken dam, and the thwarted essence of my great loss gushes over my burning heart.

"Oh, Hanna," I cry, burying my head in the black silk. "What a little fool you are! What a fool to kill yourself when you still love me. You have denied me that love all these months—months when we could have been happy together. You have hid that love in your heart, suffering yourself, wanting me, yet never letting me see you. Curse you! Yes—I should curse you for that, Hanna, damn your soul to hell and back for making me so miserable—and yourself miserable. How many times did you think I wanted to kill myself because I thought you did not love me—and it is you who kills yourself because you do love. Why did you deny us both?"

"Erik, no be cruel," she gasps, frantically, trying to rise up on one elbow. "What I do I do for you!"

"For me!" I scream, and with my face in my hands, my whole body shaking as if I am in a raging wind, I cry out my heartbreak. "May you lie

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forever in your Buddha's hell and want me as I have wanted you all these months. May your heart never know peace!"

Pulling her weak body over to me, she gathers my head into her arms, burrows her face to mine, and pleads convulsively.

"Erik—don't cry! Please don't cry! I can't bear it if you do."

At her request, for this may be her last, I wipe my eyes and, lifting my head, gaze into her tormented face—a face blazing with love, and a faint hope flickers within me.

"Hanna—listen. It's not too late. We'll get a doctor, take you to the hospital—you'll get well, honest. I'll make you well again, make you laugh again. I have enough strength for us both."

"Too late," she sighs then, with a jerky motion of her hands, pulls me to her. "You're so strong, Erik. Hold me. Hold me forever."

My arms go beneath her body and I lift her to me. There is nothing left but her, and now I am losing her, and with that loss is going the only thing to me that really matters. I cling to her and try to hold her back, but she is slipping from me rapidly, and out of my life forever.

I bury my face in the hollow of her tiny breasts, but she tugs at my hair, in an effort to gain my attention. I look up at her, and see her shining face through a blur of tears."

"The lantern, Erik. Take me—to the lantern."
Rising quickly, I lift her into my arms and carry

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her through the house and into the garden. The moon is full and the path is lit like a carpet of snow. With Rasha and Ti Si following closely, their bodies stooped, hypnotized with grief, I go slowly down the flagstone path to where the iron lantern blinks with its tiny red eyes. I go over the little red bridge and pause before the warm glow. I too am hypnotized, no more than a medium, galvanized only by this, her last command. My one will is that I carry this out, that I do whatever she wants in her last hour with life.

She looks quietly in the fire, her weak head resting on my arm, her long white robe cradling her blood drenched body in a cloudy mist. Rasha and Ti Si crowd in around us. Rasha takes hold of her hand and, in utter bewilderment, peers into her uplifted face. She sees him there and there is a faint spark of recognition.

"Rasha," she sighs, and whimpers a feeble cry. "Keep—fire in lantern."

He nods, like an obedient child with its mother.

"And—and promise—me," she murmurs, out of breath.

"I promise, sister," he cries, beginning to sob.

"Baby—look after baby—like good master—of house."

He nods, and attempts a make-believe smile.

"And—and," she struggles weakly, fighting for a last hold on life. "Look—after—Erik—too!"

Tears, unleashed, flow down my face and drip off the end of my quivering chin. My knees buckle. My

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heart leaps to my throat and I cannot swallow for the pain.

"I look after Erik," Rasha promises, and his eyes flicker on mine for a fleeting second.

"Sayonara," she says, her anguished eyes finding mine, then searching frantically for those of Rasha and Ti Si. "Sayonara—sayonara!"

Her body goes limp. Her head sags on my chest. Her arms fall like limp cut blossoms too long in the sun. A slight breeze, stealing in from Tokyo harbor, lifts her white mourning veil.

"Hanna! No die! No die and leave me!" Rasha moans, burying his head in the crook of my arm.

Ti Si comes round and lays a hand on his shoulder.

"Your sister, Hanna, with Buddha now."

Rasha sinks to the damp ground, lays his hands over the warm coals.

Ti Si motions for me and I follow him to the house. At his request I lay Hanna on her bed and he draws the veil down over her.

Folding his hands in his enormous sleeves, he looks up at me, and his face is the mask of prolonged grief.

"I go now for Priest."

On his leave I take the baby in my arms, stand over the bier for a moment, then go back to the lantern where Rasha is still sitting beside it. His face is a crimson glow as I approach, and he moves over in indication that I sit beside him.

We sit for a long time in silence. We can find no

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words. In his grief, his loneliness from loss of family and home, he lays his head on my chest, fondles the baby's outstretched hands.

"Erik," he says at last, as we watch a shooting star race the speed of light, "you stay—Hanna want you to stay. This your home."

I lift my weary head in thanksgiving. My lips tremble with a prayer. There is a God in heaven.

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CHAPTER TEN

It has been almost a month now since Hanna committed hara-kiri, and Rasha's remorseful apathy has changed little since he stood beside me at the funeral, a pale, sad-faced boy with grown-up problems and responsibilities suddenly shifted to his shoulders. He had clung to me, almost desperately, relying upon my age and experience to help with the arrangements, to receive the numerous mourners, and to preside over the household. No longer the fiery, pint-sized warrior, with a tongue of flame and physical power to match his arrogance, burning with hatred and spiced with braggadocio, he has retreated to the teenage boy he really is, the post-war Titan, discovering, finally, that he is, above all, not impotent and alone in his search for a better way of life, and in discovering this, possesses the fortitude-not like so many hundreds of young Japanese who in despair and defeat have taken their own life-to succeed.

Since Hanna has gone from us, he has grown up a little, matured, is fighting silently for his way back into a broken society that will claim him. He leans toward me for help, for support, and his progress is painfully slow. Life is rigged with booby traps, and he has become a ronin—a samurai without a master.

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Lonely, sad, lost, he regards me as his only kin, though he has a number of cousins whom he rarely visits. He has quit the Kabukiza and devotes his full time to school and the baby. He loves the little one with almost a super-human affection, and it is only through the baby that I ever see him laugh. Like all the Japanese, he is extremely fond of children, and regards my kid as his own. He has become almost docile in this new role of parent, and the whole stem of his life is channeled through me and my son.

Today the baby is seven weeks old and, according to Japanese tradition, he must be named and taken to the temple for the first time and given to the Gods.

With the baby dressed in his best, and wrapped in a pale blue blanket, for though the cherry blossoms are in full flower it is yet cold, a brisk coldness that puts pep into you, we go in a round about way to the temple, by the way of the Ginza to buy bags of candy to give to children we may happen to pass on the way to the temple.

"For good luck," Rasha informs me.

We go over the red arched bridge which flanks the Emperor's palace, pause for an instant for another ritual of good luck for the child, to throw coins in the water.

It is a long journey, a time-consuming one, for young and old alike stop us to look at the baby, to wish him a long and happy life, and to make the usual comments about those newly born, in this

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and every country in the world.

Rasha is bursting with pride. He insists on carrying the baby all the way, so I allow him this special privilege, which seems to him some kind of holy wonder.

It is said of the Japanese people that they love children more than any race on earth. Today, as I watch Rasha with my son, and to see the interest and affection the people of Tokyo take in him, I believe this implicitly.

We reach the temple and I remain in the foyer while Rasha goes with the baby to the base of the statue of Buddha. Kneeling, he lays the baby at Buddha's feet and mumbles something in Japanese. Then lifting the baby carefully, he comes back to where I stand beneath an enormous paper lantern.

"Well," I say softly, respecting the sanctity of the temple, "What have you named the boy?"

He smiles faintly.

"Tara Lee Shanon," he answers almost shyly.

"You're an odd one," I comment, looking him squarely in the eyes. "You name him after a general in the Confederate army when Japan is brimming with great war heroes."

He drops his eyes.

"Japanese warriors not good soldier like General Robert Lee."

Silently we go out onto the gallery of the temple and sit on one of the balustrades and await the final and most unexpected ritual for the baby. He must urinate, another sign of good luck in the

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Japanese world, so Rasha stuffs him with pop until the anticipated happens.

When the baby is changed into dry pants Rasha rises.

"Ritual is over. We go now."

I hesitate. The hour for which I have dreaded for over a week now is striking its toll. I have put if off day by day, night after night. I cannot, and I realize this heartbreakingly, put it off another minute.

I glance about me, at the many people visiting the shrine, dressed in their early spring best, at the sacred deer feeding on yellow moss beneath an alcove of pines, at the cherry trees flanking the walks with their bandages of straw, the huge stone lanterns like silent, defiant guards, and it all passes before me like a beautiful dream coming to an end. It is the end—for me.

"Rasha—this is good-bye," I say hoarsely, finally say it, and the sound of my rasping voice betrays my emotions.

"Good-bye?" he asks seriously, his voice sounding as if he had been hit in the pit of the stomach. His face suddenly becomes strangely pale, and he slumps on the balustrade. "No good-bye, Erik! You make big joke. You no leave Japan—huh?"

"I'm afraid it's no joke, Rasha," I explain, gaining something of courage now that the truth is out. "My outfit leaves Japan in less than a week."

"But where, Erik, where to?"

"To Korea," I reply simply. "There have been

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more outbreaks in the past month. They need more men so, since the Marines stationed at Gotemba are the closest to Korea—and the handiest we were naturally selected." I shrug.

He becomes a small fury.

"It's no fair, Erik. You already fought enough, already do your share—fight in Guadalcanal, Bougainville, fight on Guam and Iwo Jima, now they make you fight in Korea. Marine can't fight whole world for sake of peace."

I'll buy that, and the thought and hearing him put it into words makes me suddenly tired and drained of all energy.

"That is the price you pay when the Marine Corps is your lifetime career. I must go where they send me."

"I hate Marine, hate war in Korea that take you away, Erik."

He drops his head and sniffs spasmodically. He clutches the baby to his chest, as if that too is being taken away from him.

I look at him longingly and there is an awesome pain at my throat.

"When you go," he half-sobs, "what become of me?"

I try and think of something plausible, something hopeful.

"Rasha," I began slowly, "it won't last forever, then I'll come back."

He raises his dark head and looks at me.

"You won't come back, Erik. No see you ever

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again."

I move closer to him and put my arm around his shoulder. Absently I fondle the baby, see them both with a kind of fierce agony which grips me profoundly and makes life for me a living hell. How can I leave them—and the memory of Hanna? How can I leave this lovely island which has given to me my only happiness?

"I'll come back, Rasha," I promise. "Things will be better for you after awhile. Japan wants its independence, and General MacArthur is going to give it to them. He, too, will be leaving soon, going back to the United States. You can gain back your old traditions."

"I no want old traditions—I want you to stay in Japan."

I lift an eyebrow at his new declarations.

"You think that now, Rasha, but after I am gone you'll want to keep the ways of your family, as they have been kept all these many years."

"Want to be an American, be like you Erik." He lets out a defeated cry and turns his head, his watering eyes stabbing the cornflower blue distance. "When you go, me kill self like Hanna—commit hara-kiri!"

I plead with him not to do anything foolish.

"Would you do that, Rasha, and leave little Tara Lee alone?"

He shakes his head. His eyes become glued on the baby.

"No kill self, Erik. Me look after baby."

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"You be a man, Rasha, take care of the boy, go to school. I'll write every day if I can, will send you money to live on, and when it is over I'll come back to Japan, will take you and the baby to the United States."

His dark eyes glint, and he looks at me, a long,

thoughtful look.

"I'd like that, Erik. Japan—home not important anymore, with Hanna gone—and you gone. Sadness here—great sadness." He looks away again, then rises to his feet. "Let's go to house now. Unbearable here with all these people—want to be alone—to lick wounds."

We leave the temple of scarlet and gold winking under the warm sun and thread our way through the crowds and to the house on the hill. We go in utter silence, steeped in the agony of farewells and life's bitter uncertainties. The close bond we have shared is tighter now, our one consolation in that we still have each other, though the time is brief now, horribly brief!

We go up the flagstone walkway where he and Hanna and I had gone so often, and we pause unconsciously before the iron lanterns, as if drawn by it—like butterflies in some old and ancient garden.

The fire has gone out and I call his attention to

it.
"No longer matter," he answers flatly.

I say, almost bitterly.

"But, you promised Hanna."

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He looks at the baby in his arms, then at the lantern, now dark and strangely cold.

"Hanna dead, Erik," he murmurs, and with nostalgia. "Must forget old life, must take up position in world. Since the war, Japan restless and dissatisfied with things. They seem clumsy and out of style with marvels in other countries—your country. Tradition now very, very weak. In fact, may all go. New face of Japan rise up from old. Time old traditions die too."

I look at him, baffled.

"But you always set such value on tradition, and you should keep these things which are most important to you, to Hanna and your parents."

He looks at me and his eyes are lit with an intense searching, as if he has realized, but not yet wholly understood, the ultimate pilgrimage of life and life's goal for himself.

"Japan, gone with the wind, Erik."

We go up the walk then in silence, go slowly, but drawn together, and as I strip and bathe I hear him fumbling noisily in Hanna's bedroom. Then, all is silent. An uneasiness creeps over me. Getting out of the tub and drying my body hurriedly, I ease into the room.

He is lying face down on Hanna's black silk bed. He is naked. The room is weirdly lit with red lanterns, with the thick rapture of incense, and both flood over his lava colored body and strangely turn his flesh to luminous ivory.

At first impulse I think he is dead, that he has

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killed himself, and my heart leaps to my throat, then I hear his jerking, terrible sobbing.

I go to him instantly, and bend over him.

"Don't cry, Rasha," I plead, stroking his bare shoulders.

"Can't help, Erik," he murmurs, the sound of his voice muffled by his face buried in the black silk. "Not strong like you—no can bear to see you go! I —I love you, Erik!"

I pause.

"I love you too, Rasha," I finally say it, slowly, my lips suddenly trembling, for I pity him, and in pitying suddenly pity myself.

"You no understand," he whispers, his whole

body jerking childishly.

"I do not understand what?"

There is silence.

"How I love you, Erik."

I am baffled, but this leaves me with a premoni-

"How do you love me then?" I ask, chiding him mostly, though unconsciously leading him on. I am not prepared for his answer.

"Like Hanna loved you—like woman."

My heart stops, then skips into a rapid beating. I am suddenly faced with a problem. I do not want to hurt this kid, and I probe my brain for something plausible to say.

"You just think you love me like Hanna," I answer at last. I remove my hand from his shoulder. "You don't know what you're saying—

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don't know what that kind of love implies."

"You think me dumb—like ignorant school kid?" he sobs, his face in his hands. "Me no dumb. Why you think I dance in Kabuki, dress like woman—make love like woman—make love better than Hanna?"

I swallow hard as a lump leaps to my throat. He has caught me off guard and, though I had heard about queers all that part of my grown up life, had heard other Marines joke about them I had never given them a second thought. They were not a part of my life—they did not even skirt it. I had once read the Satyricon, which dwelt solely with young boy love, but had taken it with a grain of salt.

"You hate me now, Erik?" he asks, his voice drowned in tears.

"No—I don't hate you," I answer, then I ask him the all important question, the essential question. "Have you ever done . . .?

"No," he murmurs, interrupting, and he turns his head abruptly, and one glinting, tear-filled eye looks at me. "Save myself for you, Erik, hope someday you take me—like you take Hanna."

Slowly it all seems so clear, and my eyes scan his naked body, really for the first time. And, strangely, he seems so much like Hanna lying there illumed in the red glowing light, his shoulder tapering down to a tiny waist, and his buttocks are radiant and wantonly rounded. His legs are slightly spread, and my eyes wander up his luminous thighs to the dark cleft of his cheeks. A strange lust comes over me. A

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lust I cannot shrug off nor turn off. It is as if the gods had brought Hanna suddenly back to me in male form—in the sublime form of Rasha. And my hand reaches out, trembling, a hand I can no more draw back, even if it were to be severed from my body by a sword and I let it ease over his thighs, up the inner portion to his cheeks and, insanely, I lean over and kiss him on the rounded right buttock. He stirs, as if moved by my touch, his tiny frame pivoting on the black sea of silk and I ease my body up level with his.

"Love me, Erik," he whispers, taking hold of my hand. "Love me like you love Hanna—make me happy once before you go."

Suddenly this strange pleading, this longing, this reprieve from all that my life had been; this plunge from normal to profane, overwhelms me. I can not help myself; it's is if I was born to this and how natural it now seems; as if it has always been within me and is now awakening under Rasha's spell.

Kneeling, with one thigh over his, I feel a hot surge of desire wash over me and, easing upward, my arms go about his shoulders, I find the cleft and enter.

I am baffled. Though I had heard of these things in wild jokes, I had never really felt that it was possible that the male anatomy so lent itself to the role of the female. Yet, as I drive, the intense rapture telegraphs to me that this is better than female, for it is tighter, and he is so small, the

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hardness of his muscles (so utterly clean in the hot light) is suddenly transformed into a velvety softness; my hands wander over him lovingly and, as he pivots his body, I feel the ultimate of ecstasy.

We are both working now in a frenzy. Our bodies drip with sweat. Our thighs rub together in a kind of sleek friction. The roundness of his buttocks, like a sponge, fits snugly beneath my groin, and my sudden release, freeing me of all tension, riots through him as if spreading through his whole frame. He gives a contented sigh as we lie relaxed, at last. My body melts over his, and I hold him fondly. Warmly I turn his body profile to mine, twisting him from the waist as if he swivels, and I kiss him firmly on the lips, the neck, the nipples of his smooth chest, listening all the while to his heavy breathing, his softly spoken words of love. Back again to his face I kiss away his tears, smother his face, his body with mine. I want to swallow him, to get as much of him in my mouth as is possible. His warmth, his smooth, satin skin, his tiny frame below mine beckons me, draws me, and I cannot get enough somehow, cannot get close enough to him, and there is a frantic desperation to this kind of desire, to eat my fill and then to keep on eating from the sure joy of taste. Like the silver trail of a silkworm, my tongue goes down his neck, cross his chest and, with my arms firm on his waist I slip further down, as he longingly twists his body upwards, and I moor there in the dark hollow of his loins. I linger at the dark grove until his loins are

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damp, my mouth seeking, as my mouth had sought Hanna's and there seems no difference now. My hot lips go over him with the identical longing, with the same flaming passion as they went over Hanna. As I capture his pulsing excitement, his thighs coil and recoil, their smoothness warm against my ears, and then with an upward thrust, I am suddenly filled with nectar, the wild and wanton sap of his youth, and a thrill goes through me the likes of which I have never known.

His body goes limp. But it is a warm limpness, and I fondle him lovingly, kissing his inner thighs, then streaming kisses back again and again to that hollow where ecstasy dwells in limp abundance.

"Do you love me now, Erik?" he whispers, and his voice seems to come from a far way place, more like an echo of myself, my new, strange desires.

"I do, baby, I really do," I answer, kissing his relaxed body, and I slide up to his dark twinkling eyes, red rimmed now from crying, and smother him with kisses.

"Don't ever leave me, Erik," he implores, his arms going around my neck, his tiny red lips choking me with kisses.

I can find no answer. His plea falls upon me suddenly with an agonizing clarity, and for an instant, a terrible instant of agony I realize that a time for parting will all too soon separate me from this young boy of love and joy, and I wanted to cry at the thought.

So we lie in each others arms and, now that

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passion has waned, I looked at him beside me, wondering why I have involved myself with this strange activity, yet feel no shame nor lack of manhood for my crime—if this now can be termed a crime.

I know now it is no crime to me.

I had done this act out of no impulse other than my own. I had not been forced, nor enticed. I had not been seduced. And so I ask myself now if I had been motivated through my love for Hanna, my desires for her body, and through that love had, in some inexplicable phenomenon, found a facsimile in Rasha. As I lie beside this strange boy, and hold him in my arms, my lips frequently finding his, I suddenly realize that there is no answer.

A preacher once told me that if you are lonely enough you can love anything.

Was I this lonely? That I had turned to this boy, a member of my own sex for gratification? I think not. All I know is that, at times, and on certain occasions, our emotions shift, like the ground over an earthquake, and something new takes place within us, and suddenly we adapt ourselves to something which we once abhorred, loving it and hating the other.

I light a cigarette and lie thinking about it all. Rasha turns over on his side and rests his dark head on my chest. Lovingly I caress his naked shoulders, the smooth nape of his neck, his shining black hair. Outside, the world of Tokyo is in full swing—normal or otherwise, but here in this red-lit

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room, this heaven of incense, this sea of black silk, this wanton child beside me, this boy lover, I am suddenly changed. I have taken another path through life, a path of my own choice, of my own making and molding, really, and there is no going back. A year ago I would have laughed at such a fantastic idea about myself, and would have thought myself incapable of such an act, but nownow life itself has shown me something I had scorned before.

I take a puff of my cigarette, watch the smoke climb the air lazily, then glance down at Rasha who has fallen asleep on my chest. He purrs like a kitten. He has had me love him and, like a starving animal that eats at last, he is contented in that abandoned hall of sleep. I know now why he is so fond of my son. He wants it to be his. He wants to feel that he has had it instead of Hanna, and that he is my wife. I know now, too, that he has loved me all along, had gauged me even from that first night—had wanted me and had fought that want, that love that could and does master him. He has thrown everything away for me.

An hour ago he had asked me never to leave him, and I had had no answer. Now I have. I will never leave him, though he is a boy, though what we do is queer. It no longer matters. He is all I have in the world. In fact, he is my world. Who cares what we do? Who is there to care? I love to possess him, to fondle him, to make love to him. Somehow, now, it does not surprise me that I should feel this way, all

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my life loving only women. But what is the difference, really?

What is the difference regardless of the sex of a person if those two persons share an understanding, a joy of one another? Thank God I have learned not to despise something I cannot understand. I do not understand this in me, but I will not despise myself for it.

Never again will I share in the laughter and ridicule with the Marines about queers and the "henna's" of Japan. I laugh suddenly. I think how ironic it all is. Look at what they're missing!

My laugh rouses Rasha and he looks at me strangely.

"Erik," he murmurs, drawing his body closer to mine. His flesh glows like a forge. "We can run away. I know a place on Hokkaido Island, north of Sapporo where we can go, can hide in cliffs, no one find us—the Marines go to Korea, never find you."

I sigh a tired, troublesome sigh.

"They would find us eventually, baby. We couldn't hide forever. Besides, you must think of your baby—your baby and mine."

He smiles at this, and his face shines brightly.

"Then-you must go."

"Yes," I share in his grief, and say this faintly.

"Will you come back for me?"

"You know I will come back," I assure him and, pulling him to me, I kiss him again and again. "You are mine, and no one is going to ever have you except me, understand?" I pat him on the

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buttocks. "No one."

"No one ever, Erik," he cries. "Rasha live only for you."

* * *

A week later I stand on the deck of the troop ship, the U.S.N.S. General Walker, and nurse the swelling pain in my heart as Tokyo slips from view. On the wharf stands Rasha with the baby in his arms and, like that long-ago time with my first meeting with Hanna, they are being shielded from the sunlight by the enormous orange parasol held obediently by Ti Si. With the dying of their farewells is dying the last thing in the world that matters to me. God-but I have come a long way. I have a boy for a wife, and a child to keep, handed down to us by the ironic hand of fate. But what the hell! He can make love better than any woman, and is more devoted. His love is genuine. And I have never known an honest affection in any woman. At this I think of Hanna-yes-even her love was selfish, a love profaned because of her vanity in not wanting to destroy her beauty by childbirth. Rasha would have borne it gladly.

They are gone now, and only the snowy spires of Mt. Fuji can be seen in the periwinkle blue sky. I turn away from the deck rail and join the other Marines in a hand of poker.

"Thank God we're leaving that queer piss-pot," one of them says as he stares at the glittering

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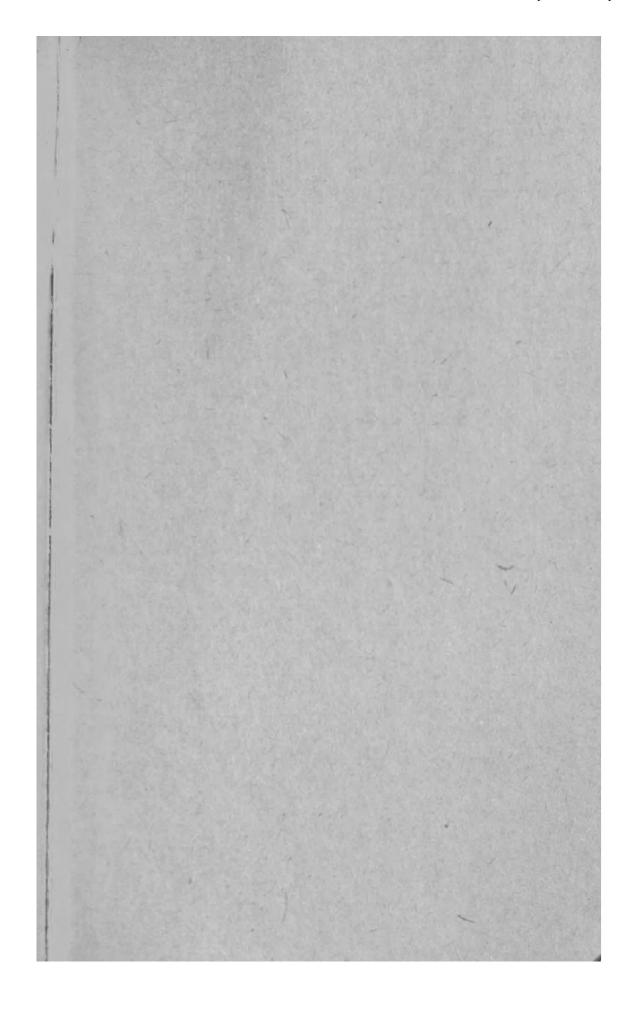
peaks.

I turn crimson.

"But I'm going to miss those blow jobs," another one answers, and everyone laughs uproariously.

THE END

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THE SCARLET LANTERN

We have gone many places in Tokyo together, Hanna, her brother, Rasha, and I — and I am puzzled, sometimes, as to which one I'm addressing — sister or brother! Their complexions are identical, unblemished and satin-smooth; they're practically the same height and weight. Often, they exchange costumes for their performances at the Kabukiza Theatre, where both play male as well as female roles.

Though of opposite sexes, they seem to intermix, at times, in my mind, creating a mysterious vacillation in sex. It is this mixture in them — one sex being dominant this minute, the other sex the next — which makes the pull of both of them on my senses irresistible . . .

To love one is to love both!





















